

# DRAGON+

**MINION MAYHEM**  
STATS FOR THE  
CHAOTIC CRITTERS!

**TOP  
TIPS  
FOR  
PLAYING  
D&D  
WITH  
KIDS**

**EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW!**

**(ALMOST) EVERY D&D  
PRODUCT IN THE WORKS**

**DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®**

**«SWIPE TO THE NEXT PAGE»**



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## ISSUE 21

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# DRAGON+ 21

## Welcome to Issue 21

*A welcome to all new players coming into the hobby...*



## Imagining the Ampersand

Our cover this issue shows a child's-eye perspective of the city of Waterdeep courtesy of Eric Deschamps.



## In the Works

Our roundup of (nearly) every D&D item in production right now



## Beadle and Grimm: What's In The Box

Beadle & Grimm's Pandemonium Warehouse is creating a Platinum Edition box



set for *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*.  
*Dragon+* caught up with  
Matthew Lillard to do our best  
impression of Brad Pitt in *Se7en*.

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## Top Tips for Playing D&D with Kids



### Gaming Clubs for Kids

Wondering how to embed new (and particularly younger) players into your game? We asked a number of experts who've established gaming clubs and they shared their invaluable advice.

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### Kid-Friendly D&D

Ease younger players into the world of Dungeons & Dragons with these accessible rules and straightforward scenarios.

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### Extra Life: Aiding Miracles, Granting Wishes



### Minion Mayhem

*Minions 2* director Kyle Balda looks at the orc-like history of his bumbling yellow characters and presents D&D versions you can use in your game!



Early details of our Extra Life 2018 events to benefit the Children's Miracle Network Hospitals, plus Mark Bonington chats with Nolan Whale about his amazing new creature, the oblex.

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## With Age Comes Wisdom: Crone's Crucible

DM Ruth Robertson adds a dash of maturity to our issue focusing on younger gamers. Having first played D&D while it was still being developed, she's now part of the livestreaming community and is better known as the Crone (but you can call her Granny Perkins).

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## Boss Battles

The creator of *Vault of Dragons* on how the board game puts a whole new spin on *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*.





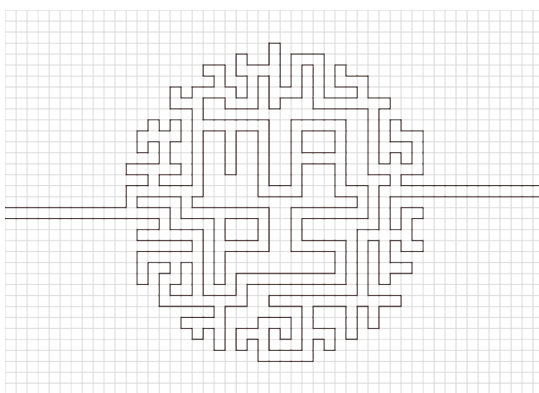
## Tutorials: Painting the Owlbear

RealmSmith's Jason Azevedo tackles the ferocious owlbear miniature from Nolzur's Marvelous Miniatures.



## Streaming Highlights

This issue we shine our spotlight on livestream games based in Waterdeep, wrestle with some newcomers and marvel at a charitably challenged Robin Hood.



## Maps of the Month

This issue, a miscellany of maps for use in your game!



## The Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild



DMs Guild Adept Shawn Merwin looks at creators writing for children, as well as urban adventuring content to expand the world of Waterdeep.

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## Dragon Classic: Art & Arcana



## Interview: Rick and Morty

Matt Chapman had the genuine pleasure of chatting with Patrick Rothfuss and Jim Zub about a crossover comic they never thought would happen

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## D&D Toons: Six Faces of Death

Jason Thompson returns with not one, not two, but six faces of death!



## Unearthed Arcana: Races of Eberron

Races from the world of Eberron



return to Unearthed Arcana this issue!

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## Next Issue: Dragon+ 22

Join our stream of consciousness  
in the next exciting edition of  
*Dragon+*!



# DRAGON+ 21

## Welcome to Issue 21

*A welcome to all new players coming into the hobby...*

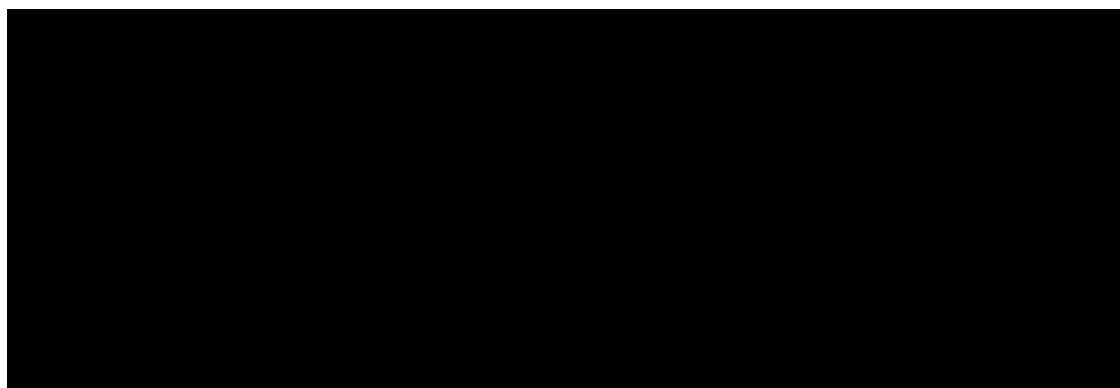
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**W**e've reached issue #21 of *Dragon+*! Meaning the online magazine is now old enough to legally drink... at least in the United States (and according to a quick internet search, also in Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Iraq, Kiribati, Micronesia, Mongolia, Nauru, Oman, Palau, Samoa, and Sri Lanka).

Of course, everyone working at Dialect's UK offices celebrated this milestone back in issue 18...

During the Stream of Many Eyes, part of the cityscape we built for Waterdeep included our very own tavern, the famed Yawing Portal (naturally!). It was quite a joyous if completely surreal experience to share a drink there alongside Ed Greenwood as Elminster himself, Trent Oster as a spot-on Minsc, and a host of other outstanding cosplayers populating the city. For fans able to visit L.A. and participate themselves, I sincerely hope you had just as much fun as we did!

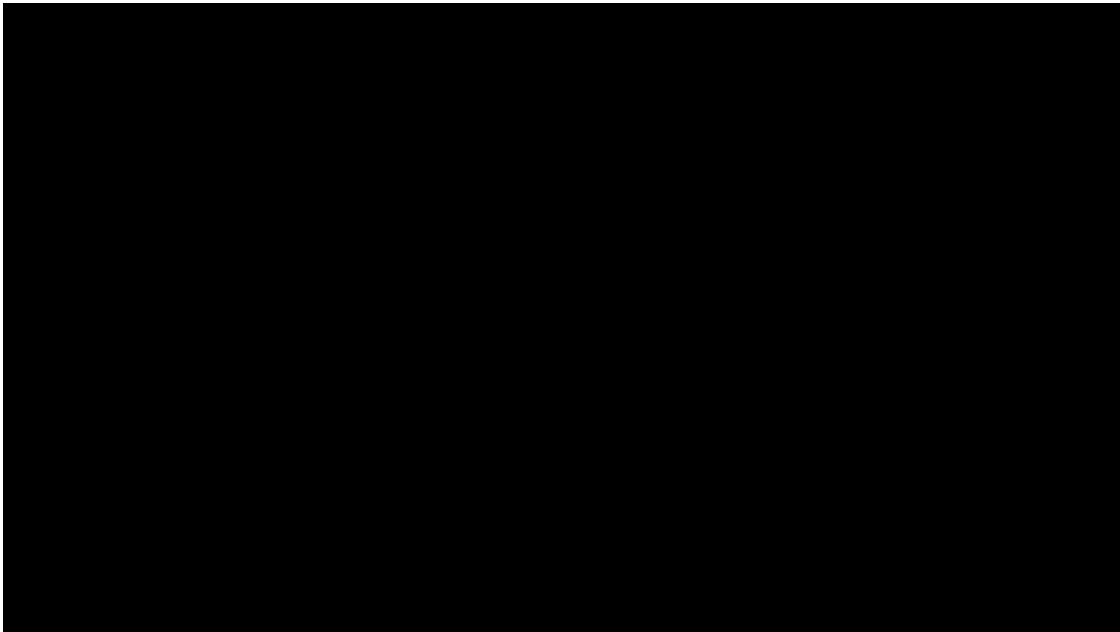
In fact, we wanted to share a few videos taken from the event. First, there's our own recap of the weekend:







And also the perspective of one such participant, D&D YouTube video creator Puffin Forest:



Among everything else, it was a unique opportunity to raise a glass at the Stream of Many Eyes! In fact, look for more on the Yawning Portal as we preview *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* later this issue (including Jason Thompson's glorious illustration of the tavern, in addition to his own adventure, *Six Faces of Death*).



A faithful recreation of The Yawning Portal (Select to view)

That said, we also want to highlight new players, including those *under* the age of 21. This issue, we'll look at just a few of the many groups and organizations playing D&D with kids. We'll speak with Nolan Whale, part of the Make-a-Wish program, about his design work featured in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. Kyla Balda offers his thoughts on using Minions as... well, minions in your campaign. And we'll discuss efforts underway with Extra Life and fundraising in support of the Children's Miracle Network of Hospitals.

I've written before about coming into Dungeons & Dragons myself as a kid—it's impact on reading comprehension (teaching me such wonderful vocabulary as portcullis, gelatinous, constitution, and carrion, among a great, great many other words), and how it helped me as an introvert both connect and interact socially with friends, first when moving around as an Army brat and later when heading off to college.

Of course, those experiences are far from unique, and over the years I've spoken with a good many people who've shared their own stories of Dungeons & Dragons having a positive impact on them from an early age. Including that, whatever else the game has to offer, among the most important is providing a chance to actively participate in heroic activities. Even if expressed in a fantasy setting, I hope the game helps kids—and really everyone who plays—better



embrace their own sense of heroism.

After all, there can never be enough of that.

Bart Carroll, Digital Marketing Manager



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## Imagining the Ampersand

Our cover this issue shows a child's-eye perspective of the city of Waterdeep courtesy of Eric Deschamps.

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**A**rtist Eric Deschamps almost stepped away from a life as an illustrator when he chose to major in graphic design at art school. It was a decision made by the head not the heart, as the graphic designers he knew earned good money and continued to do their own projects on the side. Yet eventually the lure of the fantastic drew him back to illustration with Wizards of the Coast's two most prominent brands.

“Switching to become a graphic designer actually worked out pretty well because I learned a lot of disciplines and design skills and found myself working for the television company NBC for three years or so. I really enjoyed doing that because I got to work on some great



projects,” he recalls.

“But I wanted to draw cool creatures and characters and environments so eventually I moved somewhere it was cheaper to live and worked on a portfolio for a while. I got email contacts and started submitting my portfolio to people like Wizards of the Coast, who seemed to like my work but didn’t initially hire me. So I went to San Diego Comic-Con where an art director from Wizards was doing portfolio reviews and they happened to be someone I was emailing. Having seen my stuff and talked to me in person, they gave me my first job as a professional illustrator.”

His first gig was for one of *Magic: The Gathering*’s more unconventional sets called *Unhinged*. “They had me do the Goblin S.W.A.T. Team, which was a group of goblins walking towards you with these big fly swatters. It was pretty fun,” he says. However when that art director left Wizards of the Coast, Deschamps transitioned to working with the D&D team.

“That’s how I really learned to be an illustrator, by working on Dungeons & Dragons. I probably worked on nearly thirty or so books for D&D. The first thing I did was something for Eberron, maybe the city of Sharn. I also did an image called rot roach, which was a zombie guy with all of these bugs coming out of his mouth. That was really fun.”

**You’ve worked on a lot of D&D projects. Has that continued since you first started?**

No, I probably stopped around 2010 or so and was then working on *Magic: The Gathering* pretty much full time. Then for a while half my work was for *Magic* and the other half was book covers for middle-grade readers. One popular novel series I worked on was *Fablehaven*. I liked having the two different things to work on

**How would you describe your art style?**

There are two different methods. The first way I develop something is by thinking how far I can take it just using what I know in my head. The other side of it is



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drawing and painting by gathering a ton of references. I like to push as far as I can go just doing things out of my head and then supplementing whatever I need to fix all the other parts that I don't know enough about. The style comes out of trying to find that line between the two.

That line shifts a little based on what I'm working on. If it's more the kids' stuff then I probably work a little harder on just making things up completely out of my head. Then when I get into the really important *Magic: The Gathering* stuff, something like a Planeswalker, I do a ton of research to make sure I get a lot of reference in there. It's not like I ever consciously try to come up with a style, it just kind of happens.

### **Which was the case with these Waterdeep images: lots of research or creating from scratch?**

I don't think I ever came upon Waterdeep when I was working on D&D for all those years. Somehow none of my projects ever touched on it. So Wizards gave me some material to look through, and I researched Waterdeep to get a feel for what its different sections were like. There are a lot of different portions to the city and they all have their own influence through world history, so I made sure I knew that. The image on the cover is one of four I created featuring those three street urchins, and I tried to put each one in a different area of the city. Doing the four different seasons was also a ton of fun.

### **Were you the perfect pick for this project having worked on both children's books and more fantasy-based images for *Magic*?**

I'd hope so. I was really excited to be able to combine my two worlds. The art director from *Magic: The Gathering* recommended

me to the D&D team because she knew I also worked on kids' books. These illustrations were primarily going to be featuring these three kids and so I was a perfect fit for that.



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It was pretty neat because that's only happened to me once before. In *Magic: The Gathering* I've worked on a lot of Planeswalkers and they were doing a set called *Origins* where they took a few of these characters and came up with a backstory that showed them as kids. They had me do the concept art for that project and it was really cool.

**Were they specific about how to include a mention of the four possible villains in each scene? We have Xanathar's shadow, Jarlaxle's hat, Manshoon's snake and one of the Cassalanter...**

Those elements were specifically requested, so for example, they wanted a shadow looming over the top of the kids. I wanted to make it so that at first glance you wouldn't notice it and then if you look a little harder you see Xanathar's outline.

They similarly asked for the hat so there's one boy wearing that. I don't know if he found it or he stole it but those three kids are just goofing around. The one boy is pretending he's Jarlaxle on top of the barrel and the girl is trying to knock him off—if you notice he's



stolen her sword. That one I was able to come up with a little bit of the storytelling. I figured out that I wanted to have these kids be playing and fooling around together, with one of them just laughing.

### **How close is this final image to the initial pitch?**

Pretty close. They wanted me to add some carnival vehicles in the background, which is actually cropped off for this cover. The poses of the kids also changed a little but their playful interaction is the same. Initially the pose of the main boy on top of the barrel was a little too theatrical so I had to change that a little. I also made it more obvious that the girl was pushing the barrel over but those were little things.

### **What's your working process like?**

It changes and I do like having some variety. For this one, I did some little thumbnail drawings. I found one that I liked and scanned it in using Photoshop so I could move elements around. I also refined the poses with a little extra detail, but not much. That's just to check that I like the composition. Then I print it out again and maybe blow it up, put it on the light table and put a fresh piece of paper over it and really refine the drawing.

Once I'm happy with that I'll scan it again and bring it back into Photoshop and start painting underneath the line drawing until I get it to a point where I really like it. Then I can go over the top of that and render it a little more to get rid of the lines. That was pretty much how I created all four of the posters.

### **What's your experience with D&D?**

When I was in elementary school or about that age, my next door neighbor liked Dungeons & Dragons so I'd go to his house and we'd be up in his room, just the two of us. I remember having a grand old time just coming up with characters, thinking of names and getting all the stats. I'd probably do a drawing, too so that was my favorite part.



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After that, he'd be Dungeon Master and bring me through some little adventures. It was a really long time ago and I have no idea if he was using the real rules or just making stuff up, but I had a lot of fun. He eventually moved away and I didn't have anybody to play with. I can't tell you I was the most proactive kid to find a new person to play with but it ended there. I think it took me a long time to open up as a person where I was comfortable storytelling and doing things out loud with him because I was quite a subdued and shy kid. That's probably what slowed me down in not trying to find someone else to play with.

### **What kind of characters did you play?**

I always wanted to be one of the character classes I wasn't familiar with. I would try to find something as odd as possible. I would never have picked the human fighter, it would have to be some weird half-race.

## **Artist Selection – Chris Perkins**

“A simple question began rattling around in my head over two years ago as I was bidding farewell to Barovia, dragging myself out of the

depths of Maelstrom, and planning a yearlong expedition to Chult. Where do we go next? After mulling over several options, we decided it would be refreshing to return to civilization. *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* is a treasure hunt with an urban backdrop. We've visited Waterdeep before, but not like this..."

To see more of Eric Deschamps' work visit his **official website**, the **Magic: The Gathering website** or connect with him on **Instagram** and **Twitter**.

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# IN THE WORKS



# PREVIEWS



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## IN THE WORKS

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# In The Works

## WATERDEEP, DRAGON HEIST

While we'd hate to spoil any secrets concerning the location of the treasure itself, we did want to delve further into what's in store in *Dragon Heist*. What better place to start than a few words from the adventure's opening gambit:

*Welcome to Waterdeep, the Crown of the North, where a wondrous tale of urban adventure is about to unfold. Our story begins with the gathering of adventurers at the Yawning Portal Inn and Tavern. Volothamp Geddarm, the famous explorer and raconteur, has a quest for them—one that entangles the characters in a bitter conflict between two nefarious organizations. If the adventurers complete his quest, Volo rewards them handsomely. Yet a much greater prize lies hidden somewhere in the City of Splendors, waiting to be claimed.*

And as Chris Perkins writes in the foreword:

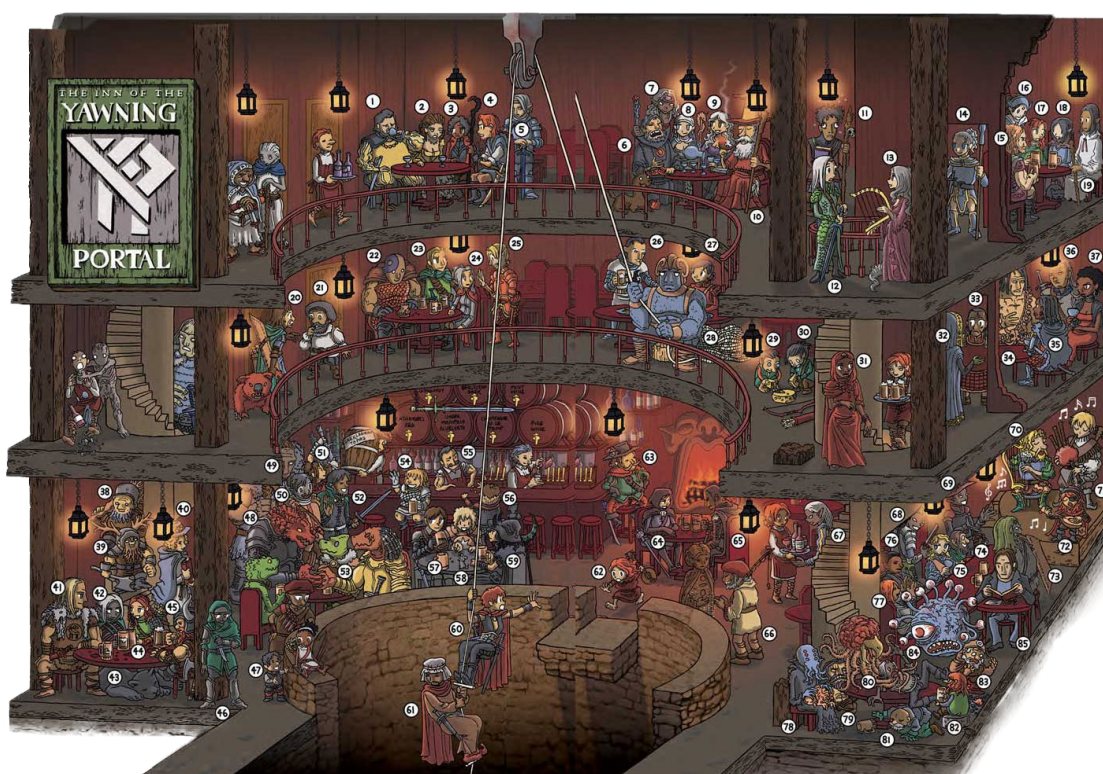
“A simple question began rattling around in my head over two years ago as I was bidding farewell to Barovia, dragging myself out of the depths of Maelstrom, and planning a yearlong expedition to Chult. Where do we go next? After mulling over several options, we decided it would be refreshing to return to civilization. *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* is a treasure hunt with an urban backdrop. We've visited Waterdeep before, but not like this...”

For this issue, we wanted to offer a taste of the material from *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* that helps flesh out this city. And for those of you planning your own treasure hunt, you should first be aware of Waterdeep's Code Legal. After all, you wouldn't want to run afoul of the City Watch.

As mentioned in our Welcome Letter, we also wanted to showcase further details from the renowned tavern, The Yawning Portal. So we've included a look at some of the key NPCs you might meet here. Plus, Jason Thompson created the following cartoon map of the tavern itself—this version without the actual answer key; after all, we'd love to hear your ideas as far as who's who! Just drop us your guesses at [https://twitter.com/wizards\\_dnd](https://twitter.com/wizards_dnd).

[Download Waterdeep: Code Legal](#)

[Download Yawning Portal: Friendly Faces](#)



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## YAWNING PORTAL

Plus, for more early looks at *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* actually being played around the table, check out many of the livestreams taking place on the official D&D channel—including Rivals of Waterdeep, Roll20 Presents, and the soon-to-return HighRollers. You can find out more on these and other streams later in this issue!

## 123s AND ABCs OF D&D

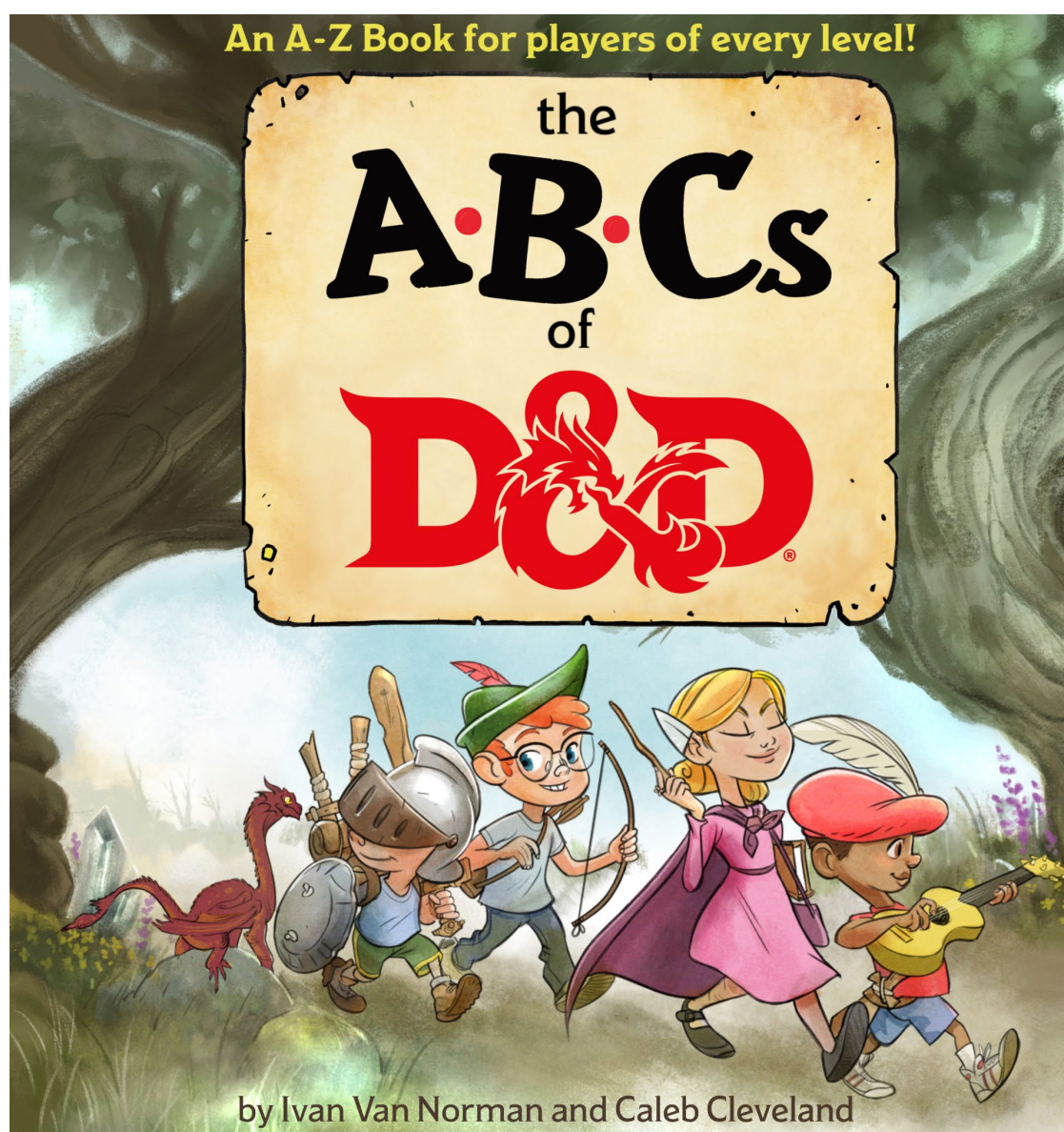
In addition to D&D's next major adventure campaign, we also



wanted to highlight product offerings that would make great gifts for younger gamers. For starters, you might be familiar with Ivan Van Norman's and Caleb Cleveland's previous collaboration, the **ABCs of RPGs**. They're back with two equally bright and wonderful primers!

With the *123s* and *ABCs of D&D*, kids can learn their letters, numbers and love of D&D with read-aloud-friendly rhyming couplets from Ivan and adorable illustrations from Caleb.

You can pick-up both books on October 23!



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[123s of D&D – More Info](#)

## ABCs of D&D – More Info

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### ADVENTURES OUTLINED

One of our first forays into the world of Dungeons & Dragons (in addition to the *Dungeon!* board game) was the AD&D coloring album. It's therefore thrilling to know there's a new coloring book releasing at the end of the month, with pages deviously drawn by Todd James and illustrations described by Adam Lee.

We'll also readily agree that coloring books are just as fun (and soothing) for adults as they are for kids. *Adventures Outlined* is available everywhere on August 21.



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[More Info](#)

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### ENDLESS QUEST

As an amendment to my statement above—the original *Endless Quest* series was *also* a gateway product that furthered our interest in



D&D (and kept us immersed in the game when not at the table or brute-forcing our way through marigold-colored character sheets). I can still remember the water weird jumping out at me in *Dungeon of Dread*....

So it's great to see a new generation of *Endless Quest* books coming out later this fall. Written by Matt Forbeck, these follow the adventures of a rogue, cleric, fighter, and wizard, respectively. In fact, we're currently reading through an advance copy of *Escape the Underdark* (the fighter's tale) in our household right now:

*You awaken in an underground cell, stripped of your armor and your sword. Your fellow prisoners inform you that you're trapped in the Underdark, soon to be taken to the great drow city of Menzoberranzan and sold off as a slave. But word is that demons are stirring in the underworld's depth. Perhaps you can use that to break free, fighter.*

All four titles are available September 4.



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## D&D CORE RULES GIFT SET

And what better gift to get new gamers started than a copy of the three core rulebooks? The D&D gift set includes a copy of the *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*, as well as a Dungeon Master's Screen—it's everything you need to create and play adventures of your own in the world's greatest roleplaying game!

Need a refresh on your well-worn copies? Have a friend who is itching to get into the game? Want a super-handy case to hold all that D&D goodness? The cover design of these books gets a little reinvigoration and includes the most up-to-date rules. You can find this package everywhere on October 23.

Plus, special alternate covers from Hydro74 have been gracing the shelves and tables of D&D fans since 2016's *Volo's Guide to Monsters*. In fact, Hydro74 created one of our very first covers for *Dragon+* for issue #2! Now you can expand your collection with a set of all three core rulebooks in a single attractive package with new cover art in Hydro74's distinct style, exclusive to games stores slightly earlier on October 19.



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[More Info](#)

## GUILDMASTER'S GUIDE TO RAVNICA

And finally, here's a gift for existing *Magic: the Gathering* or D&D players looking to crossover! Previous Plane Shift articles have toured various planes from the *Magic* multiverse, providing them with D&D stats and mechanics. Now, here comes an entire sourcebook, covering the plane of Ravnica!



If you're not familiar with this plane, imagine a worldwide cityscape of grand halls, decrepit slums, and ancient ruins. Looming over it all presides the vast—and vastly powerful—City of Ravnica. You can find out more [here](#).

And from the book itself (releasing everywhere November 20):



[More Info](#)

*A perpetual haze of dreary rain hangs over the spires of Ravnica. Bundled against the weather, the cosmopolitan citizens in all their fantastic diversity go about their daily business in bustling markets and shadowy back alleys. Through it all, ten guilds—crime syndicates, scientific institutions, church hierarchies, military forces, judicial courts, buzzing swarms, and rampaging gangs—vie for power, wealth, and influence. These guilds are the foundation of power on Ravnica. They have existed for millennia, and each one has its own identity and civic function, its own diverse collection of races and creatures, and its own distinct subculture. Their history is a web of wars, intrigue, and political machinations as they have vied for*

*control of the plane.*

*Welcome to the perfect blend of story from the creators of Magic: the Gathering, wrapped around the rules, monsters, and magic of fifth edition Dungeons & Dragons. Play a member of your favorite guild as you explore all the mystery and adventure within the grand city of Ravnica.*



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# THE CODE LEGAL

Punishment for a crime can include one or more of the following, based on the nature of the crime, who or what the crime is committed against, and the criminal record of the convicted:

- Death
- Exile (for a number of years or summers)
- Floßging (a set number of strokes)
- Hard labor (for a period of days, months, or years depending on the seriousness of the crime)

- Imprisonment in the dungeons of Castle Waterdeep (for a period of days or months depending on the seriousness of the crime)
- Fine (payable to the city; inability to pay the fine leads to imprisonment and/or hard labor)
- Damages (payable to the injured party or victim's kin; inability to pay damages leads to imprisonment and/or hard labor)
- Edict (forbidding the convicted from doing something; violation of an edict can result in imprisonment, hard labor, and/or a fine)

## I. Crimes against Lords, Officials, and Nobles

Assaulting or impersonating a Lord: death

Assaulting or impersonating an official or noble: floßging, imprisonment up to a tenday, and fine up to 500 gp

Blackmailing an official: floßging and exile up to 10 years

Bribery or attempted bribery of an official: exile up to 20 years and fine up to double the bribe amount

Murder of a Lord, official, or noble: death

Using magic to influence a Lord without consent: imprisonment up to a year, and fine or damages up to 1,000 gp

Using magic to influence an official without consent: fine or damages up to 1,000 gp and edict

## II. Crimes against the City

Arson: death or hard labor up to 1 year, with fines and/or damages covering the cost of repairs plus 2,000 gp

Brandishing weapons without due cause: imprisonment up to a tenday and/or fine up to 10 gp

Espionage: death or permanent exile

Fencing stolen goods: fine equal to the value of the stolen goods and edict

Forgery of an official document: floßging and exile for 10 summers

Hampering justice: fine up to 200 gp and hard labor up to a tenday

Littering: fine up to 2 gp and edict

Poisoning a city well: death

Theft: floßging followed by imprisonment up to a tenday, hard labor up to 1 year, or fine equal to the value of the stolen goods

Treason: death

Vandalism: imprisonment up to a tenday plus fine and/or damages covering the cost of repairs plus up to 100 gp

Using magic to influence an official without consent: fine or damages up to 1,000 gp and edict

## III. Crimes against the Gods

Assaulting a priest or lay worshiper: imprisonment up to a tenday and damages up to 500 gp

Disorderly conduct within a temple: fine up to 5 gp and edict

Public blasphemy against a god or church: edict

Theft of temple goods or offerings: imprisonment up to a tenday and damages up to double the cost of the stolen items

Tomb-robbing: imprisonment up to a tenday and damages covering the cost of repairs plus 500 gp

## IV. Crimes against Citizens

Assaulting a citizen: imprisonment up to a tenday, floßging, and damages up to 1,000 gp

Blackmailing or intimidating a citizen: fine or damages up to 500 gp and edict

Burglary: imprisonment up to 3 months and damages equal to the value of the stolen goods plus 500 gp

Damaging property or livestock: damages covering the cost of repairs or replacement plus up to 500 gp

Disturbing the peace: fine up to 25 gp and edict

Murdering a citizen without justification: death or hard labor up to 10 years, and damages up to 1,000 gp paid to the victim's kin

Murdering a citizen with justification: exile up to 5 years or hard labor up to 3 years or damages up to 1,000 gp paid to the victim's kin

Robbery: hard labor up to 1 month and damages equal to the value of the stolen goods plus 500 gp

Slavery: floßging and hard labor up to 10 years

Using magic to influence a citizen without consent: fine or damages up to 1,000 gp and edict









## Beadle and Grimm: What's In The Box

Beadle & Grimm's Pandemonium Warehouse is creating a Platinum Edition box set for *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*. *Dragon+* caught up with Matthew Lillard to do our best impression of Brad Pitt in *Se7en*.

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Even if you don't recognize actor **Matthew Lillard** from his excellent turns in movies such as *Scream*

and *The Descendants*, you'll instantly place him as the man who brought Shaggy to life in the live-action *Scooby Doo* movies and further animated tales. What you won't recognize him as is a storekeeper. But as the Beadle from Beadle & Grimm's Pandemonium Warehouse, he is one of the driving forces behind a new company creating a premium edition of D&D products.



Matthew Lillard

Beadle & Grimm's first product will be a boxed Platinum Edition of *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*. While the idea for a premium D&D product was first floated only a couple of years ago between Lillard and his friends, the motivation came from wanting to cement the relationship that had grown between a group of gamers.

"I first found Dungeons & Dragons when I was nine or ten. I think that D&D was a big part of why I ended up becoming an actor because it's a game built on imagination. This one kid was the DM and he was a really good storyteller. When I look back on it now we spent entire summers playing campaigns, but when most people phased out of the game I phased out too.

"Then I went to acting school in New York and I was helping my roommate move in and he had a bunch of D&D books. About six months later after a Super Bowl, a bunch of us were sitting around talking about going to a party and I said, 'Why don't we play D&D?' And we started playing at twenty-one-years-old. I'm now forty-eight and I still play with the same group of guys.

"We all have families and we all have jobs and this is now how we get together to spend time—we play Dungeons & Dragons. So at one point we were all trying to come up with something new to do together and we were looking to find something that resonated with what we love to do. My buddy Bill said, 'What if we did a Platinum Edition of a Dungeons & Dragons adventure?' The second it came



out of his mouth, we all thought, ‘That’s it!’”

## Crisis Management

Lillard admits that the whole idea was a sort of mid-life crisis response from his group. But instead of buying a fast car, they were thinking about things that played into the wheelhouse of what they love: escape rooms, mystery boxes, and immersive experiences.

“This idea is to deliver a platinum box game experience that goes hand-in-hand with D&D releases. These highly-curated, very limited runs would be a little more expensive,” he explains. “We’re only making 1,000 of these so we’re not trying to hit everyone because there are all levels of players out there. My kids play—they’re sixteen, thirteen, and ten. They’re not buying a Beadle and Grimm’s Platinum Edition.”

The friends figured the audience for this exclusive product was groups like them, rather than individuals. Lillard calculates if there’s an average gameplay of twelve to fourteen months and five people chip in \$100 to buy the \$500 Platinum Edition, it actually works out at less than \$10 a month each.

“Our pitch is what you don’t have in time to create, we’ll source and have people create for you and we’ll fill that box with stuff,” he says. “It might seem like a lot to charge \$500 but there are five of us who play and we’d happily chip in \$100 each. And for that rate over that period of time, we’re going to deliver you a badass product.”

Now all they had to do was convince the licence holders. His chance came when he was invited to play in the 2017 Stream of Annihilation, just two weeks after his friend Bill had originally floated the idea.

“I asked if I could bring my buddies along because we all play together. We had talked about it a little but we hadn’t really worked out what the product was going to be. But I saw [Dungeons & Dragons Senior Director] Nathan Stewart on the street one day with Mike Mearls and I said, ‘I’m going to walk over there and pitch him my idea.’ All my buddies were like, ‘No, don’t!’ They thought it had to be planned out in greater detail but I just wanted to see what they’d say.

“That was a great conversation. I basically said, ‘We’re thinking about doing this, what do you think? Does it make sense and is it something you like? And can we bring you back a pitch?’ Nathan was enthusiastic about the idea and we spent the next three to five months putting together a prototype.”

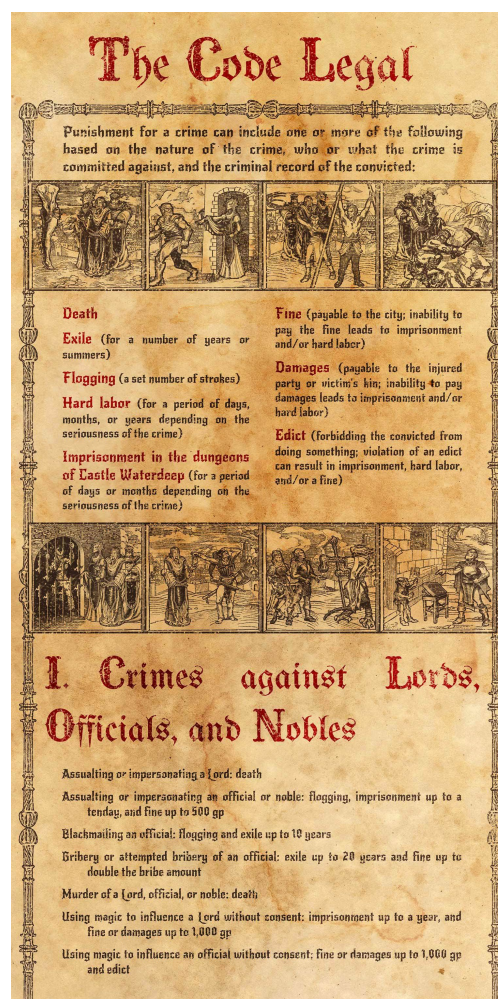
## Head in the Clouds

Flying up to Seattle to pitch the box to Wizards of the Coast must have felt like being in an episode of *Shark Tank*—although the title of the same programme in the UK, *Dragon’s Den*, would seem more appropriate. Lillard and his cohorts had built a prototype around the Acquisitions Incorporated module *Cloud Giant’s Bargain*.

“Here we are this little group of five guys trying to create something. We spent a bunch of money and made some mistakes but we figured out a lot of stuff. When we presented the box everyone at Wizards of the Coast thought it was awesome. So they gave us the green light to build this company.”

If the product was initially pitched at the Stream of Annihilation, a second stream would also play a major role in Beadle & Grimm’s evolution as a company. *The Stream of Many Eyes* was the springboard for Wizards of the Coast to officially announce *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*, which Lillard’s premium box would be enhancing.

“About six months before the stream, Greg Tito reached out to us and asked me specifically if I wanted to play in any games. In 27 years I think I have played four characters, as our games are long-running campaigns. I wanted to play Beadle, who is a character I played for seven years and hasn’t



been played in probably the same amount of time,” he says.

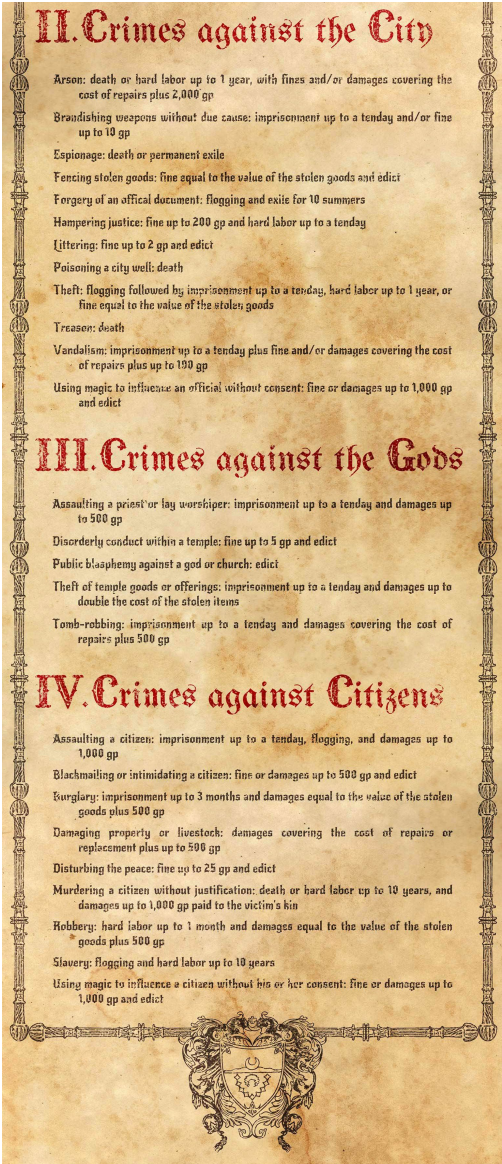
However, it was the chance to see Beadle & Grimm’s Pandemonium Warehouse brought to life on the city streets that really helped put the company on the map: “We came up with this idea of the store looking like Ollivander’s Wand Shop from *Harry Potter*, so we had all these boxes and we talked in funny accents. The fun thing about that weekend for us is that we launched on Friday and we sold 100 boxes.

“Being in love with an idea and releasing it to the world and seeing if people liked it as much as we did was pretty validating. People walking around were hearing about it and seeing the box and being able to touch the elements of the playtest prototype and saying, ‘Yeah, we’ll take it.’ That was super-exciting.”

## Built from Experience

When it came to deciding what went into the box, the Beadle & Grimm partners wanted to take the 100 years of gameplay experience they shared between them and apply it to the product. The kind of questions they asked were, what’s going to increase the player’s gameplay? And what can the DM deliver to make that moment more epic?

“That’s hard,” Lillard admits. “But we like physical items. We have a DM that pulls a lot of images up on his iPad and says, ‘You see this.’ That moment of really seeing what you’re looking at is like a magnet—you’re all off in your imagination and you’re brought together with



(Select to view)



a piece of art. That really gets you all on the same page before your imagination takes you into different worlds again.

“The question was, how do we deliver that impact? We came up with these encounter cards that have a picture of whatever you’re fighting on the front, with all the information for the monster on the back. They can hang on the DM screen so you can see what you’re fighting and the DM can see the stats. We think that is a cool way to deliver those images, instead of the DM grabbing a book and having to cover the stats as they show you the creature for two seconds before it goes away. If you’re fighting a badass lich or a dragon and it’s sitting there the whole time, it makes an impact.”

During an AMA on Reddit the company supplied a little more information on what’s it’s proposing to put in the box: eight battle maps; twenty-two miniature figures; separate encounters; pregenerated characters; Dungeon Master’s screen; and encounter cards. Initially there was an idea to have Platinum, Gold and Silver editions, with a price point level for more players, but that strategy is on hold for now.

“We don’t have the capacity right now to make something for everyone. In time we’ll deliver all levels and other products,” Lillard says, also noting that the premium product will launch just after *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* hits shops. “We have to wait until Wizards of the Coast locks its creative. Otherwise all of a sudden you’re building a room or doing a battle map and that battle’s gone. As soon as they do that, we have the ability to pull triggers. So we’ll be a little behind their release but we’ll be pretty close.”

## Special Delivery

What’s reassuring is the passion behind the product from Lillard and his team, who have gone from being five guys who play D&D to a company that wants to delight its customers.

“We need to convince people that what we’re doing is worthy of their attention. And that’s hard. But we believe in this space and we believe in the community and our goal is to deliver a product that people love so we become synonymous with giving people an awesome return on their investment.



“It’s all been a steep learning curve, but that’s cool. We’re really excited because we’re starting to get the first prototypes back and see the elements we’re creating. There’s a pressure on us to deliver a really high-quality piece of work but I feel that’s what we’re doing. And over the course of the next two boxes, we’re going to learn a lot about our customers and what they want and need.”

What’s most amazing is that no-one had this idea before, given how ubiquitous premium edition releases are in other formats.

“We had a candid conversation with a guy in the D&D licensee world about getting minis from him and he’s like, ‘I cannot believe I didn’t think of this idea!’”

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**Head to [Beadle & Grimm’s Pandemonium Warehouse](#) to learn more about the tools that make **Dungeon Masters** the very best DMs they can be or **pre-order** *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist Platinum Edition* now.**

*Art shown is for example only. This is not official Waterdeep: Dragon Heist art.*

BACK TO TOP



# The Code Legal

Punishment for a crime can include one or more of the following based on the nature of the crime, who or what the crime is committed against, and the criminal record of the convicted:



**Death**

**Exile** (for a number of years or summers)

**Flogging** (a set number of strokes)

**Hard labor** (for a period of days

**Fine** (payable to the city; inability to pay the fine leads to imprisonment and/or hard labor)

**Damages** (payable to the injured party or victim's kin; inability to pay damages leads to imprisonment and/or



months, or years depending on the seriousness of the crime)

**Imprisonment in the dungeons of Castle Waterdeep** (for a period of days or months depending on the seriousness of the crime)

hard labor)

**Edict** (forbidding the convicted from doing something; violation of an edict can result in imprisonment, hard labor, and/or a fine)



# I. Crimes against Lords, Officials, and Nobles

Assaulting or impersonating a Lord: death

Assaulting or impersonating an official or noble: flogging, imprisonment up to a



tenday, and fine up to 500 gp

Blackmailing an official: flogging and exile up to 10 years

Bribery or attempted bribery of an official: exile up to 20 years and fine up to double the bribe amount

Murder of a Lord, official, or noble: death

Using magic to influence a Lord without consent: imprisonment up to a year, and fine or damages up to 1,000 gp

Using magic to influence an official without consent: fine or damages up to 1,000 gp and edict

## II. Crimes against the City

Arson: death or hard labor up to 1 year, with fines and/or damages covering the cost of repairs plus 2,000 gp

Brandishing weapons without due cause: imprisonment up to a tenday and/or fine up to 10 gp

Espionage: death or permanent exile

Fencing stolen goods: fine equal to the value of the stolen goods and edict

Forgery of an official document: flogging and exile for 10 summers



Forgery of an official document: flogging and exile for 10 summers

Hampering justice: fine up to 200 gp and hard labor up to a tenday

Littering: fine up to 2 gp and edict

Poisoning a city well: death

Theft: flogging followed by imprisonment up to a tenday, hard labor up to 1 year, or fine equal to the value of the stolen goods

Treason: death

Vandalism: imprisonment up to a tenday plus fine and/or damages covering the cost of repairs plus up to 100 gp

Using magic to influence an official without consent: fine or damages up to 1,000 gp and edict

## III. Crimes against the Gods

Assaulting a priest or lay worshiper: imprisonment up to a tenday and damages up to 500 gp

Disorderly conduct within a temple: fine up to 5 gp and edict

Public blasphemy against a god or church: edict

Theft of temple goods or offerings: imprisonment up to a tenday and damages up to



double the cost of the stolen items

Tomb-robbing: imprisonment up to a tenday and damages covering the cost of repairs plus 500 gp

## IV. Crimes against Citizens

Assaulting a citizen: imprisonment up to a tenday, flogging, and damages up to 1,000 gp

Blackmailing or intimidating a citizen: fine or damages up to 500 gp and edict

Burglary: imprisonment up to 3 months and damages equal to the value of the stolen goods plus 500 gp

Damaging property or livestock: damages covering the cost of repairs or replacement plus up to 500 gp

Disturbing the peace: fine up to 25 gp and edict

Murdering a citizen without justification: death or hard labor up to 10 years, and damages up to 1,000 gp paid to the victim's kin

Robbery: hard labor up to 1 month and damages equal to the value of the stolen goods plus 500 gp

Slavery: flogging and hard labor up to 10 years

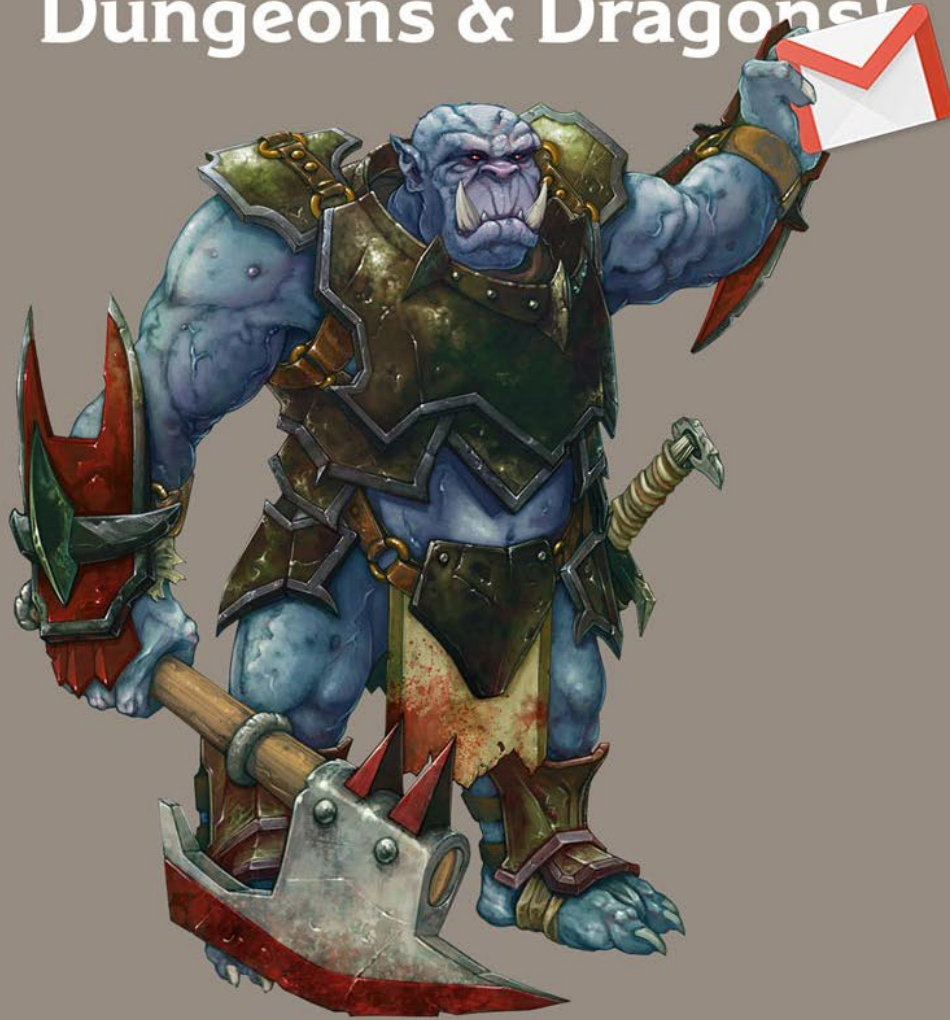
Using magic to influence a citizen without his or her consent: fine or damages up to





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# Top Tips for Playing D&D with Kids



## Gaming Clubs for Kids

Wondering how to embed new (and particularly younger) players into your game? We asked a number of experts who've established gaming clubs and they shared their invaluable advice.

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*Dragon+* spoke with a range of people who have launched their own gaming clubs to find out how they got started and how they deal with one of their biggest challenges: new and young players. Whether these groups spring to life naturally in gaming stores, are put together by staff in a library, develop through interested parties at a workplace or are set up by teachers looking to run an after-school club, they all require effort. The good news is that all of the people we spoke to agreed that it's a rewarding experience that's worth persevering with.

We know you'll benefit from their experience and advice, whether you're a new player looking to get started, a DM planning to integrate players into your game or someone setting up a new roleplaying society.





## KATRINA MIDDELBURG

THE AMERICAN SCHOOL OF THE HAGUE

High school teacher Katrina Middelburg didn't know what she was starting when she sat down behind her desk to DM a game of Dungeons & Dragons for four seventh grade students. Five years later, the RPG Club at the [American School of the Hague](#) included both middle and high school students and averaged between thirty to forty members each year. Students carrying dice bags and the *Player's Handbook* became a normal sight in the hallways and one parent who became a DM even gleefully said: "We're bigger than the basketball team!"

Middelburg has since handed the thriving club over to physics teacher Greg Kremer and IT staff member Mark Pilk. Having previously shared the history of the club's birth at [the Roleplaying Tips website](#), she was happy to update that sage advice for anyone hoping to emulate its success.

### **Get permission.**

"This might sound stupid but it helps to ensure that your group lasts longer than just one year. Make sure anyone whose facilities you might be using knows that you're planning the group and that they support you. When I started the RPG club, I went to my principal with the core rulebooks and a set of dice, explained the game and asked her permission to set up the club. Having each player sign permission slips also helps protect the club—and you."

### **Yes, charge them!**

"We ask for a small amount of dues for a yearly membership. It's about \$10. If we had to rent our own space, that amount would be much higher. The money is spent on club supplies such as dice, books, pencils, munchies for all-day conventions and prizes when

necessary. Also, it helps cut down on absenteeism—if someone’s a paid member, they’re more likely to take it seriously and keep showing up.”

### **Location, location, location.**

“Finding a good place to play is important. We started out in classrooms but as the club grew we needed more room. The RPG club now meets in the cafeteria. Everyone is in one space, we wheel the books and supplies in on a cart that was saved from the AV discard pile and snacks and drinks are close at hand from the nearby vending machines.

“Everyone playing in the same location is crucial. It helps the students feel like they are part of the larger club, not just their own gaming group. Kids often eavesdrop on other campaigns when they have a few minutes and a powerful, intense battle in one group can draw spectators from around the room. A side benefit of playing in a very public space is that the club has become well-known and accepted at school. Sometimes people drop in and watch for a while. That’s great advertising and helps keep the club’s reputation positive.”

### **Rules are important!**

“Make sure everyone involved knows what the expectations of the club are. This can be simple stuff like showing up on time or letting your DM know if you are going to miss a session. But it also involves those more nebulous rules like not hogging the spotlight or willfully messing up your DM’s plans. Our group actually uses the five do’s and don’ts from *Dungeons & Dragons for Dummies* [Bill Slavicsek & Richard W. Baker, 2005] as a guideline. And we have the students sign a contract before they get started. That way nobody can use the excuse, ‘But I didn’t know I couldn’t do that!’”

### **Players helping players.**

“Once your group grows a little, the experienced players can answer questions, help build characters and eventually DM for other groups. We use a tiered system and only high school students with more than one year of experience are allowed to DM. The DMs have access to their own private section of the website where they can ask each other questions and share tips and ideas. A great way to encourage players to take on a leadership role like this is to link up with anyone



at your organization who sets up community service programs. Some of our DMs are fulfilling high school community service graduation requirements by DMing a group each week!”

### **What about newbies?**

“One of the challenges facing the club had been with the massive influx of newbies at the beginning of each school year, and frustration with some of the behavior—attacking NPCs, trying to hoard all the loot for themselves, rules lawyering or arguing about the DMs’ decisions. By the time the DMs had gotten their players into more positive table play practices, the school year was nearly over and a new school year started the process all over again. Johnn Four at [Roleplaying Tips](#) suggested we start each year with a mini-convention in which the new players were mixed in with different DMs and experienced players. This convention plan was developed and has helped us teach good roleplaying, fast.

“Other things that have helped with newbies: handing out prizes for great roleplaying, strategy and teamwork; giving them pre-made characters until they are able to create their own; putting them in groups with two or more experienced players who can model good roleplaying; and having a club library where players can borrow gaming books like the *Hero Builder’s Guidebook*, *Dungeon Master for Dummies*, and other great titles that help new players get a grip on good roleplaying habits.”

### **Manage the groups.**

“The point of the club is to give kids a chance to hang out with their friends and roleplay. But sometimes friends aren’t the best match as players. Also, groups kept breaking up and reforming, which frustrated the DMs. Now those in charge choose the groups. We ask each player to fill in a survey form at the end of the Learn-to-Play convention and on the basis of these forms—plus the input of the DMs—we set up the groups. We try to put friends together but also keep a good balance of different ages, experienced players and new players, and match players’ styles with DM campaign styles. We allow players to switch once during the year, just after the winter holiday break. Often this break comes and no one wants to switch groups! Now our games are much more consistent and both the DMs and players are having more fun.”

### **Get help.**

“Once the club really took off it was clear that I couldn’t do everything myself. I was lucky enough to find two fellow teachers who are also gamers and we were able to share responsibilities for the group pretty equally.”

### **XP as bribes!**

“As the club grew it also became increasingly difficult for me to keep close tabs on all the groups’ adventures. We set up a website which only members of the club had access to then started offering a small amount of XP to any player who posts a recap of a session’s events. We also award small XP bonuses for any players who post their character’s history. The result is regular reports of group activity, plus lots of fun for all club members as they get to read about their friends’ successes and show off their own amazing moments.”



**JUSTIN DONIE**

WIZARDS OF THE COAST

**Justin Donie** has been playing D&D since 1984 and started working as a technology producer at Wizards of the Coast (WotC) in 2012. Two years later, he started hosting fifth edition games at the company and currently runs three games. When he noticed interest for more organized internal play, he launched DnD101 as an “open to all” club for people interested in learning more about fifth edition D&D, with a particular focus on new players.

Eventually rebranding itself as the D&D Discussion Group (D&DDG), the group really took off when WotC hosted a “Back to Wizards” event (like a Back to School day) highlighting all of the company’s clubs and activities. “The D&DDG had a table at this event and it really helped get the word out to a much larger cross section of WotC folks and our weekly attendance started to increase,”



remembers Donie.

With the number of players growing, the group expanded its activities. *Magic: The Gathering* already held internal release parties for new sets, so the group took on the same for D&D, which featured live play of adventure material related to new books being released, and eventually came to feature not just WotC employees but their friends and family as well. Now the D&DDG and the D&D Team co-host three book launch events each year and work together on projects that help provide information to the D&D R&D team.

“D&D is a very inclusive game that traditionally welcomes new players to join in and learn by participating, with the folks around the table helping out during the game so that learning is organic. This mechanism works well for those who feel socially comfortable joining in with little or no prior knowledge of the game. But for those who’d like to get a bit of a leg up first, other than watching streamed games and reading books there aren’t many ‘How to ramp up as a new D&D Player’ approaches out there,” says Donie when we ask how he would help new players take their first steps in the game. “My advice is as follows...”

### **New player games.**

“A DM looking to help new players come on board can start a game or campaign specifically targeting new players. This should include a ‘session zero’ meeting where the basics are explained and players are assisted in the process of selecting and creating their first characters. Some of the players in those beginners’ game can be experienced but letting folks know upfront that a game is specifically designed for newcomers lowers some of the barriers for entry. We tried such a game with a batch of WotC interns and it worked very well. Those with some experience helped those without and ramping up was fun.”

### **Q&A sessions.**

“Another way to introduce newcomers is to host a Q&A session and make it clear that the purpose is to explain D&D to anyone who isn’t already familiar with it and to answer any and all questions they might have about both getting involved and playing the game. This can handle questions both from a player point of view and the DM point of view, as a certain percentage of new players quickly find the DM side of the game most appealing.”

### **Game shadowing.**

“Allow people who are new to the game to come and observe an ongoing campaign and ask questions during the breaks.”

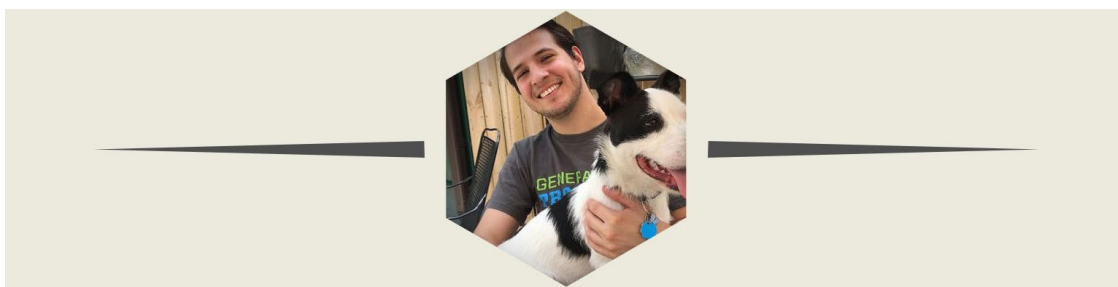
### **1:1 sessions.**

“On several occasions I’ve had people reach out to me and ask ‘how do I get started in D&D as a new player?’ While I always tell them about the **Starter Set** and the *Player’s Handbook*, I find a big part of what they want is simply conversation around what D&D is, how it works, and how to ramp up without the social pressure of other people being around while they are learning the game. If potential players are introverted, this one-to-one approach is a way of lowering the learning barrier without any social pressure.

“I typically meet with folks individually for about 30 minutes to find out what they know about D&D so I can tailor my presentation to them. I provide a mix of history of the game, ideas behind roleplaying, anecdotes from real play, some introductory exposure to the core books, Starter Set, livestreamers and D&D Beyond, as well as highlighting core concepts like shared story-telling and rules-as-skeleton not rules-as-law, etc. The idea is to help folks understand in a private setting the basics of what D&D is and how it works.”

### **Drop-in game.**

“We are currently developing a drop-in format where players can just appear and play for one session or infrequent sessions, without any commitment, just to get more exposure.”



**BRENDEN RIGGS**

JAMES MCHENRY ELEMENTARY-MIDDLE

“Oddly enough, Game Club started with me being asked by the athletic director to be the head football coach for our school,” says



**Brenden Riggs**, Tech Educator at **James McHenry Elementary-Middle**. When Brenden declined, citing that he was always an ‘inside kid,’ and never left the house long enough to learn anything about football, his principal suggested that he start an after school program to bring together all students including more ‘inside kids’ at the school.

“My first thought went to D&D. I got to work immediately, using my lunch duty in the cafeteria as time to gauge student interest in the club. Some kids had their own ideas of what the club should be, so I took those into consideration as well. After about a week of planning I decided to expand the club to include video games and board games as well. I put together a flier, passed it around to the sixth, seventh and eighth graders, and had a stack of permission slips waiting in my classroom.”

### **Party Up.**

“The first month or so is the most difficult time period. Kids are often intimidated by new games with tons of rules, especially if they’re having to learn those rules in front of their peers.” Brenden recommends that you find friends, other teachers at the school or volunteers from your local gaming store to help you DM, in case some kids feel that they might not be comfortable with the game well enough to DM themselves at first. “Luckily I have a few really awesome friends from my own D&D group who were willing to take some of their time to volunteer for this program. This made it a ton easier to teach the rules to the kids, as we were able to break into groups as small as three to five players.”

### **Attendance.**

At the end of the day, kids aren’t always the most reliable human beings. “Your party may not always contain many, if any, of the same kids from session to session. That’s okay. The way we got around this story-wise is by saying that each of the kids’ characters were inexplicably popping into and out of existence, occasionally showing up at another place and time entirely.”

### **Keep it simple.**

“Don’t over-complicate things. Don’t feel bad about disallowing wizards or other spellcasters for a kid’s first character. The less rules they have to learn at first, the better. The cool part about D&D is that

its super flexible, and the rules aren't super important as long as you're having fun. I remember the first session where one of our DMs let a kid turn into a dragon and clear out a dungeon. Now, there's no reason that a first-level barbarian should be able to do that, but at the same time that's the only thing that the kid would talk about for the next week. He loved it."

### **Build character slowly.**

"The first time I introduce D&D to a kid, I usually just ask them a series of questions. Are you strong? Are you fast? Are you smart? Are you good at talking to people? I get them thinking about their character in those terms, and then set the scene in a tavern. I tell them that they're out having a good time with friends, and they see some large angry men bullying another patron. Then I ask: 'What do you do?'"

"Regardless of their answer, hand them a D20 and have them roll for it. If they do something that their character would be good at, give them at least a +5 bonus to the roll. If the kids move straight to combat instead of trying to talk to the bad guys, I may have a bartender or a guard intervene to force them into a roleplay scenario. After it's done, I ask them if they enjoyed it. Every kid enjoys it."

### **Loot.**

"The kids want cool encounters and each needs to have their moment to shine. You as the DM should try to provide that for them. But most importantly: loot. Everyone loves loot, but the look on a kid's face when they're given a *frost brand* weapon is priceless. Reward kids who make an effort to learn the game. Soon, they'll start enforcing rules on each other. It's a rewarding experience when you realize, 'Hey, this kid is pretty good at D&D.'"

### **Inclusion.**

"Make sure that every kid is being heard out and not spoken over. Have them raise hands to speak if they can't manage it themselves. Otherwise you'll have one or two loud kids at the table hogging the spotlight while the other kids fight to get a word in."

### **Lead by example.**

"If you can manage to take a week off being DM, join in on another group's session and play alongside the kids. Show them how it's



done, but encourage them to take leadership in the group.

### **Build a story together.**

“When you’re the DM, use characters that you’ve played in past campaigns as NPCs. Bring in that old character sheet for your level 16 war cleric and let the kids take a look at it. Then maybe have them join that character’s guild and appoint them as ‘interns’. Have them clean up a dungeon that you’ve been through recently, finishing up any enemies that slipped through and picking up any loot that you missed. Perhaps they’ll find the *deck of many things* that your party agreed to leave behind...”

### **Manage your expectations.**

“Don’t expect too much progress in a single session. Kids get side-tracked more than you could possibly imagine.”

### **Organization.**

“Collect all the character sheets at the end of every session, otherwise they will most definitely disappear.”



**ROB GRUBER**

**GOOD TIMES GAMES AND ELECTRONICS**

“My *Heroes of Hawethorne* kids’ campaign has been running in my store for just over eight years now; and I have many kids who have been playing with me for the entire duration, with boys and girls as young as five even, playing weekly,” says Rob Gruber of **Good Times Games and Electronics**.

“Our D&D program is now over 400 boys and girls, with the majority being girls. It has grown to include weekly D&D birthday

parties and a crazy series of D&D summer camps all summer long. Some of the mothers wanted to understand better what their kids were so excited about every week and that spun off into what was supposed to be a one-shot for them, but they fell in love with the game too, and my *Ladies of Hawthorne* went from six players last year to more than 35 in weekly sessions. “D&D is a huge part of operations in my store now. Parents strive to get their kids signed up to the announced sessions each week, and everyone sees incredible value in the program. In my little community, D&D is a regular part of daily life: it is discussed everywhere, our mayor plays in special events here, and our oldest hero will be 78 years old this year!”



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### **Use their enthusiasm.**

“Kids want to be there and I use this natural excitement to walk them through their first sessions and keep them going through the years as well. Rules aren’t as important in this environment, keeping things rolling with exciting narrative and ensuring everyone is involved is the priority. Nothing makes six to ten-year-olds lose interest quicker than having to pause to open a rule book. Common sense and interpretation of the situation is more than enough to give you a ruling, modifier or statistic that will work in the situation. I have been a DM for decades with very little need to consult rules mid-game.”

### **Be visual.**

“Kids—and adults as well—love visuals to help them get a better idea of what is happening. Miniatures and terrain are great resources, while being prepared with scrolls, maps and visual cues will keep the kids engaged and invested in your stories.”





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### **Breed heroes.**

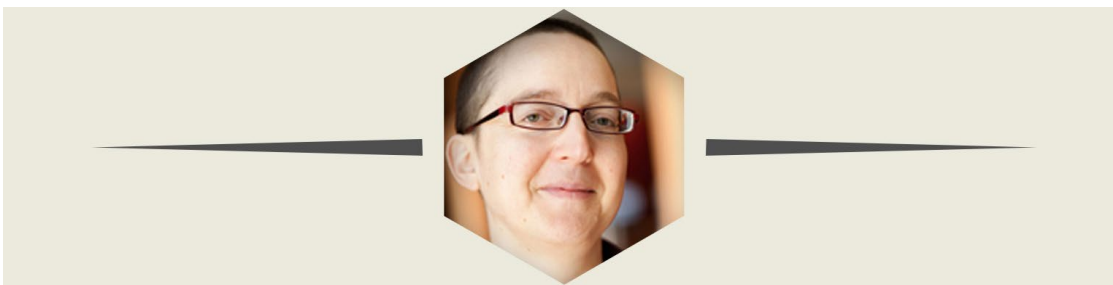
“It’s important to focus on being heroic and good when you’re playing with kids. Building a kids’ campaign requires something that you don’t need with adults: the complete trust of their parents. If you allow evil characters and classes, let them make less-than-honorable decisions, or run lone wolf and not play as part of the team you will lose the trust of the parents and your campaign will flounder because of it. D&D can give young players the chance to be heroes, do heroic things, help others and save the world. In a world that often glamorizes the less-than-honorable, we could certainly use the development of a few more heroes.”

### **Time it right.**

“I write all of the campaign content each week. Our sessions for kids are two-and-a-half hours long and that seems to be perfect for young players: not too long but long enough to offer a good story with interactions and conflict each week.”

### **Absorb the stats.**

“I take many of the numbers out of the hands of the players: much of the AC, hit points and other important combat statistics are kept behind the screen for the DM to track. This enables me to use narrative to describe how heroes’ feel rather than just give straight numbers. It makes it more of a story and adventure than a statistical game, and keeps the heroes’ attention and imaginations firing.”



## ANNA DOHERTY

### GAMING TOGETHER

“I started the D&D group for my son and I sent out an announcement to the school saying what kinds of kids might like it and offering to run a little group in the summer. That was five years ago,” remembers **Anna Doherty of Gaming Together**. “That mushroomed until I had too many kids to run in one group and now I do a lot of after-school groups and summer camps.

“D&D touches on everything you would want a kid to work on without them even realizing they are working on it. You don’t have to drag them kicking and screaming into math practice or their social skills development or getting them to use their imagination or think about tactics. They also have to negotiate with the people in their group and with other characters in the game so it is perspective taking.”

Doherty says that’s even the same when it comes to ‘monsters’, even though these creatures are so unlike the party members themselves. “They look different and they sound different but the kids very quickly figure out that a creature has its own backstory, its own emotions and motivations. So they’ll say, ‘Do we have to fight it? Or can we actually figure out what it needs and offer it something?’ So they end up turning all of these adventures on their heads which is the most fantastic thing in the world.”

“When they’re so focused on themselves they can’t understand that someone is having a different experience, that’s where many social problems come from. This helps give them perspective. It’s a great way of practicing frustration tolerance, because the group doesn’t always choose your path. And when they become excited about D&D they build a social connection that they can take with them anywhere



and that's almost more important than the game itself."

### **Fight the fidget.**

"Plan for the kids to struggle with sitting down and focusing, and treat it as an opportunity." Life is full of moments, Anna says—like work meetings!—when you have to stay at the table without distracting those around you, and stay connected enough to what's happening that you're ready when it's your turn to speak. "D&D is a great opportunity to try out different approaches to this common challenge. Provide the kids with a basket of fidgets of all types: thinking putty, magnet toys, magnetic poetry—the troll version is awesome, fidget cubes, etc."

### **Keep moving.**

"Plan to take a ten to fifteen minute movement break every forty to fifty minutes. Bring nerf swords, capes, wizard hats, bean bags, etc. Require all the kids to get up and go outside ideally and run around. Provide a snack and require them all to eat something."

### **Rules lawyer.**

"If you have a kid in your group who can read the book and remember all the rules, then buy them the books and use them as a living encyclopedia."

### **Pay it forward.**

"Use your own in-game currency to reward the behaviors you want. I use poker chips as my 'monies' and they can earn five monies if they are ready as soon as it is their turn in combat, three monies for roleplaying appropriately, and one monies every time they don't distract the person whose turn it is in combat. Then they can use their monies to buy things that help their characters: advantage for fifteen monies before they roll, or twenty-five monies after they rolled and failed; a *healing potion* for seventy-five monies. Instead of snapping at the kid who is being distracting, you just start handing out chips to all the kids who are not being distracting, while looking at the distracting kid—they get the message quickly. It's so much better than yelling at them to pay attention."



## ETHAN SCHOONOVER

LAKE WASHINGTON GIRLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

“A couple of years ago I made a career change and started my role as technology director at a local girls’ middle school. I was midway into my second year there before D&D showed up on the radar as a possible school activity. Some of the girls had seen dice or rulebooks in my office and asked if I played,” says **Ethan Schoonover** from **Lake Washington Girls Middle School**.

“I cannot emphasize enough the impact that the *Stranger Things* TV series has had on them. I loved the show as well but primarily because I grew up in the ’80s in a small Wisconsin town riding BMX bikes, playing D&D, and talking on giant walkie-talkies. So it was perfect that the girls saw this very old school D&D play in the show. That classic style of play is my jam.

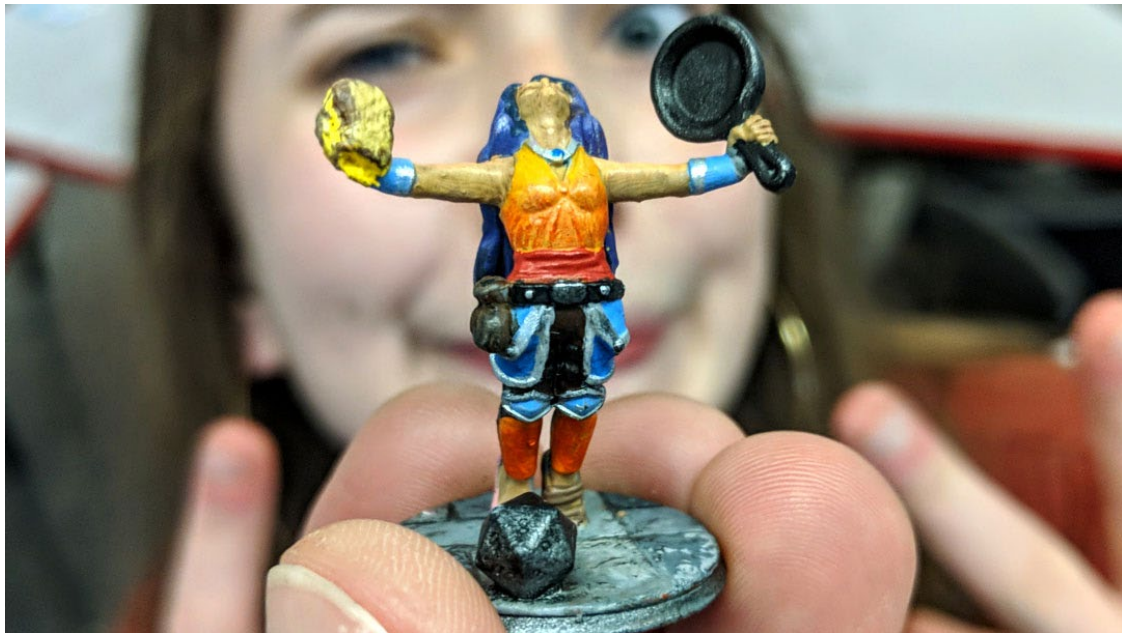


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“I made an offhand comment about starting a D&D club of some sort, and that was it. For the next several weeks I had a daily question: ‘Mr. E, when is D&D club starting?’ When January rolled around this year I reserved a Friday night slot, up went the posters and out went the email.

“I knew that I wanted our RPG play at the school to be current D&D so there was no question it was going to be fifth edition. I love the 5e rules for their modularity, overall simplicity, and flexibility in terms of play style. I made only one significant modification to the rules for use with my D&D club: I started at zero level.”

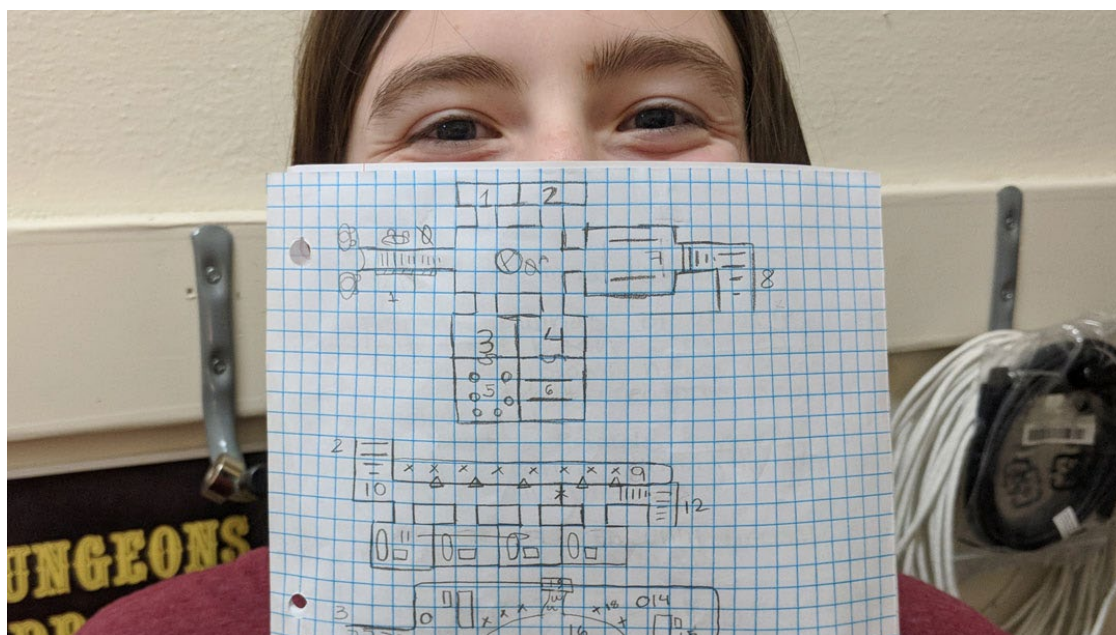


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Originally Schoonover also decided to cap the group at four players, but soon enough a fifth was asking to join and then the parents of a sixth girl emailed him urging that he consider a spot for their daughter. While he was a little anxious about running a six-person group at the time, he’s since overcome that initial anxiety and run groups as large as fourteen for special events at the school.

“The success of the club saw us expanding our D&D offerings to an actual twice-weekly elective class during the day, as well as our first week-long D&D summer camp. We have 110 girls at the school and I’ve had 24 different club, class, or camp participants, so we’re getting close to a quarter of the school having been involved in the D&D program.

“Unlike the backgrounds in the *Player’s Handbook*, none of the backgrounds I created were heroic and everyone started off as a commoner. We had glass blowers and farmers, scribes and stable hands, apprentice hunters and woodworkers. Everyone had implements related to their profession: for example, the glass blower had a long metal rod that could be used as a tool or a weapon and the scribe had a pen knife, long enough to wield for low damage should things get serious. Which they did, of course.



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“As we went along I introduced new concepts, such as character alignment. During their first fight with some kobolds the girls subdued them and tied them up. There was discussion about what to do with the prisoners. Kill them? Release them? Keep them tied up? We used this as an opportunity to assign alignments to all characters and play out the scene as alignment suggested. My one rule was ‘no evil PCs’. They opted to leave them tied up so they couldn’t cause any more trouble and the players came away with a better understanding of alignment.

“D&D summer camp was a little different. We only had one week and I wanted to expose them to as many of the core rules as possible so I opted to have them start at level one normally. I also recruited two local DMs to run the camp as co-teachers with me, which was the first time I experimented with expanding the DMing to someone besides myself. I was lucky to recruit Kat Kruger and Hadeel al-Massari as they brought unique D&D experience to the camp. Both



write content and DM: Kat runs the popular d20Dames podcast and Hadeel appears on the official D&D Twitch channel in multiple live play streams.

“We also had guests such as Kate Welch and Jen Vaughn visit us. I love seeing the girls realize that not only is D&D a game that they can play, but it is also a game that they can *create* as well. Vaughn is an artist and writer—and d20Dame—and managed to do some amazing craft and art activities with the students in a fun half-day session.

“During that summer camp we also managed to pack in miniature painting, voice acting practice, improv games, and even a trip to shoot at an archery range, in addition to running an epic three-group D&D campaign that culminated in all fourteen girls coming together for a final battle to save the realm. I had multiple parents come up to me after the camp and tell me that this had been their daughter’s favorite summer camp of all time. I know it would have been mine as a kid as well.”

**Finding a club to play Dungeons & Dragons near you is as easy as entering your postcode into the [Store and Event Locator](#) .  
Happy gaming!**



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## Kid-Friendly D&D

Ease younger players into the world of Dungeons & Dragons with these accessible rules and straightforward scenarios.

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**G**etting started is often the biggest hurdle to overcome with any new hobby. If you're considering taking up a pastime like roleplaying, that goes double. After all, what's more challenging than an activity that requires other willing participants, specialist materials and an understanding of how the game is played?

Thankfully, the people behind Dungeons & Dragons have done everything they can to make it as easy as possible to join in the fun. For example, budding players can find a group to play with using the [Store and Event Locator](#). If you're doing that, just make sure to call ahead at your friendly local gaming store to see if they have room for new players and to confirm times.

As for the specialist materials, new players can also find a free copy of the [D&D Basic Rules](#) online. These will explain how to play the game, teach you about character creation and also help you



understand more complex elements like combat and magic. However, it's not necessary to read it from cover to cover or memorize its content in order to play so don't be put off by anything you don't understand.

You likely won't have to go through that character creation alone, either. Most groups will be happy to meet you before a session starts so that they can help you build that warrior or wizard you've been longing to play.

Once you have found people to play with, perused the rules to a point where you have a basic understanding and have finished picking a suitable character, the game doesn't suddenly need to dive off a cliff edge of impossibility. The important thing is to keep it fun.

“The best way to introduce new players to tabletop RPGs is with enthusiasm and patience. You want to avoid assaulting them with a textbook of rules and instead focus on the experience of being at the table—of playing a role, of rolling dice and having an enjoyable time,” says **Andrew Armstrong**, Creative Director at Dawnforged Entertainment and an Elementary Lead Teacher.

“For the actual content and substance of your first adventure, make sure that the objective is made clear to the players and is very straightforward to accomplish. New players are simply trying to get a handle on what this tabletop gaming thing is all about. They're intimidated by the rules, they don't know when to roll the dice, they might be embarrassed about putting on a voice or talking in character so you do not also need to burden them with a complex, multi-level, 1,000 NPC *Game of Thrones*-type of story. Just make it very simple: goblins are attacking the town; stop the goblins.”

With that simplicity in mind here are a number of scenarios and entry-level products that will help your novices find their hairy halfling feet in no time.

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## D&D STARTER SET

Not only does the *D&D Starter Set* come in the kind of box that harks back to the early origins of

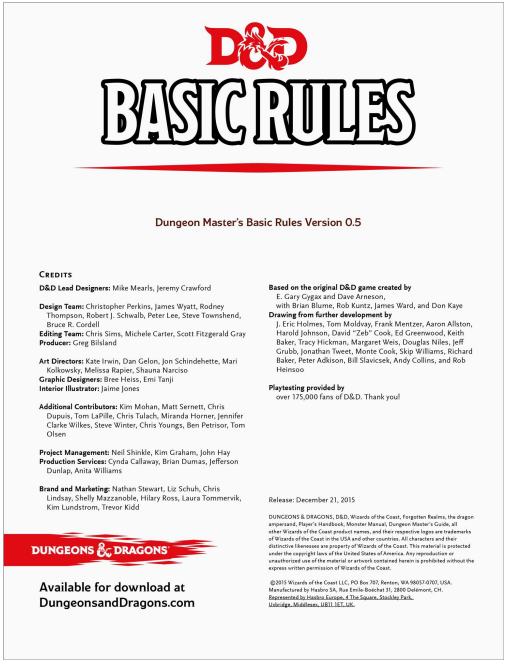
the roleplaying game, it also lives up to its name and includes all the elements you need to start playing. That includes an adventure book containing everything the DM needs to know and a rulebook explaining character options for players, as well as five pre-generated character sheets and six dice that will have you rolling your first initiative in no time. You can [find more information here](#).



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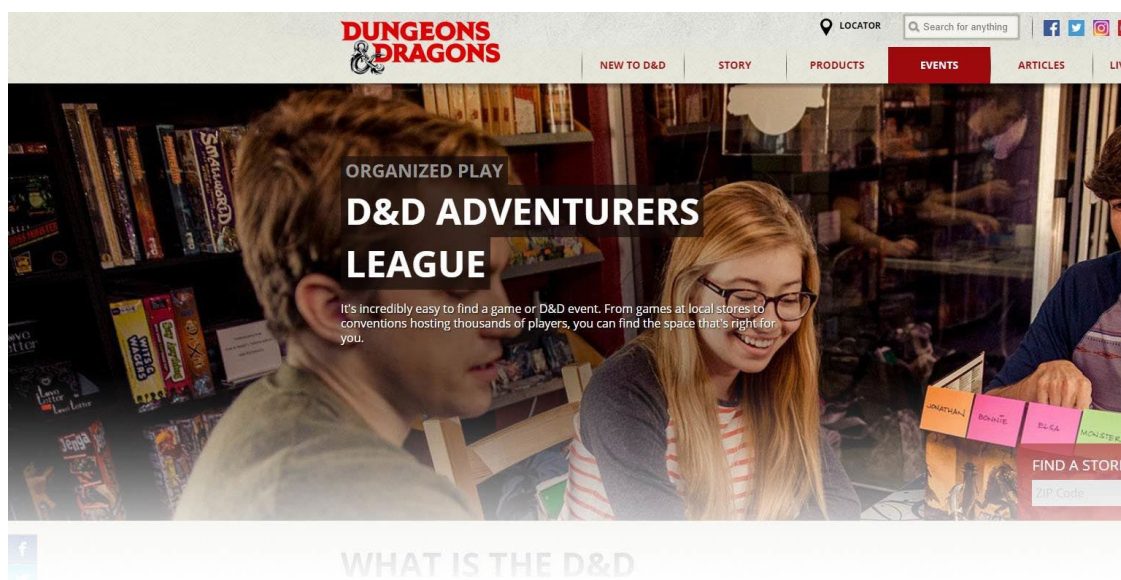
## D&D CORE RULES

Once players decide they want to move beyond the scope of the *Starter Set* there are three books that help guide future adventures: the *Player's Handbook*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*. A new *Gift Set* edition of the D&D Core Rules brings all three essential books together in a handy box and even packs in a Dungeon Master's screen featuring essential information to help speed up play. It's available on October 23, 2018 and you can [find more details here](#). Look out for the version sporting alternate covers from artist Hydro74.



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## D&D ADVENTURER'S LEAGUE



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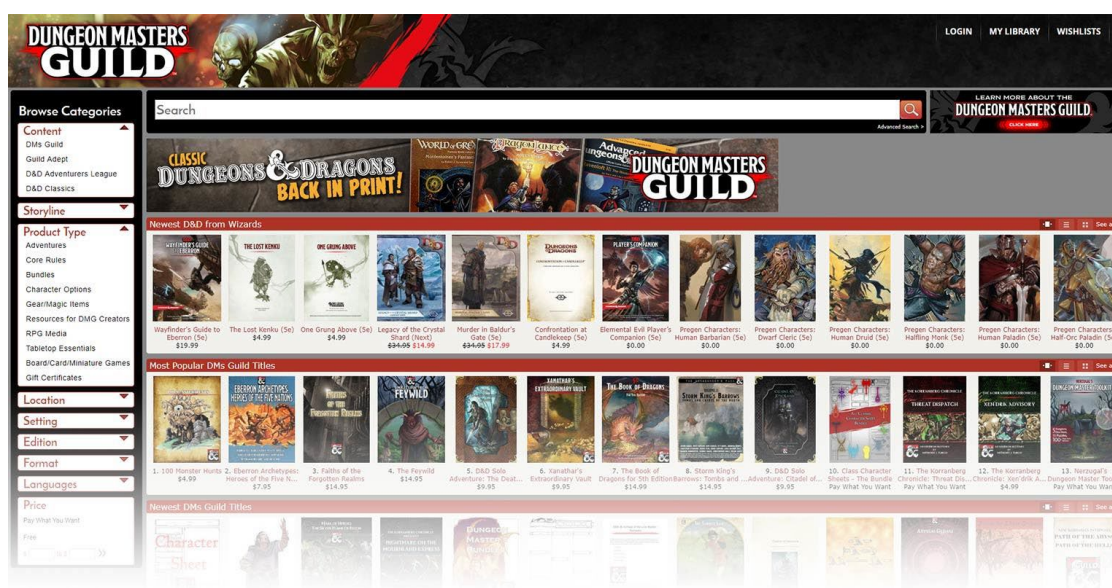
“I use a lot of the D&D Adventurers Guild scenarios that are meant to be run in an afternoon at the gaming store,” says [Anna Doherty from Gaming Together](#). “Even though the kids take three times as long to run through them, they work pretty well. They’re structured to have a nice balance between roleplay and combat in chunks you can resolve as opposed to a huge open-ended adventure.”

You can sign up to play in the D&D Adventurer’s league and find participating games using the [Store and Event Locator](#) mentioned above. Many of these scenarios are also made available for purchase in the DMs Guild once they have been used in live-play events, and can be [found by clicking here](#).

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## DMs GUILD





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The DMs Guild is a useful source of everything from adventure scenarios and character options to new weapons and spells. It's also got some dedicated products aimed at thrilling your younger players.

We'd particularly like to flag the work of **Emmet Byrne**. Not only is his fabulous scenario *An Ogre and His Cake* (created with Christopher Waltz) tested by kids to be a great introduction to D&D for players aged five and above, it's also a charitable adventure that benefits the Extra Life initiative (more on that on the following page).

Byrne clearly likes introducing new players to the game as he has also created character sheets built specifically with young heroes in mind. Simplifying many aspects of regular character sheets to make them as easy to understand as possible, they are even broken down by color so you can tell very young gamers to "Look in the purple box" when they need to check their skills. You can find the **Kid Friendly Character Sheets** [here](#).

We're also giving away Jennifer Adcock's scenario *Grammy's Country Apple Pie* in this issue of *Dragon+*. This kid-friendly adventure is for heroes of all ages and experience levels and is yours to download for the life of this issue, so head to this month's round-up of The Best of the DMs Guild and get it before *Dragon+* Issue 22 is released.

# OTHER KID-FRIENDLY RPG GAMES

*No Thank You Evil* by Monte Cook

Price: \$19.99-\$39.99

This tabletop game of make-believe, adventure, and storytelling sees each player create a character based on a couple of cool, descriptive traits. The Guide (often played by a parent or older sibling) then presents a dilemma, and the players set off on an adventure where they'll have to use their character's special skills, companions, and equipment to overcome obstacles.

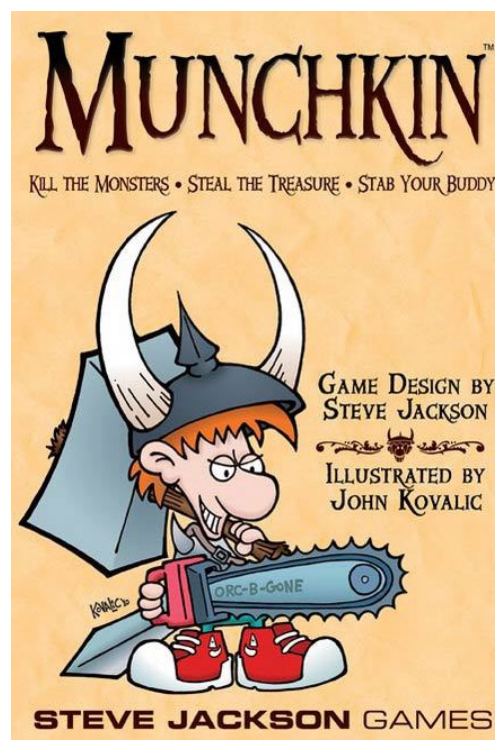


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*Munchkin* by Steve Jackson Games

Price: \$19.99-\$39.99

This dungeon adventure is light on roleplay but big on fun, as a group of friends aged ten and above compete to kill monsters and grab cool kit. Illustrations by John Kovalic add to the magic.



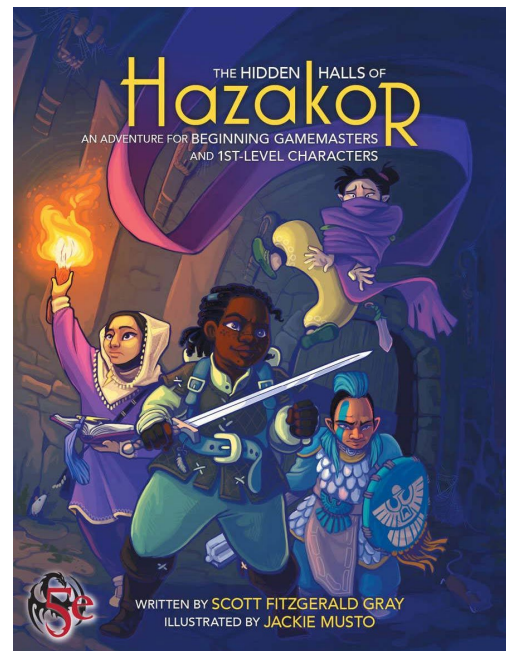
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*Hidden Halls of Hazakor* by Scott Fitzgerald Gray

Price: \$10-\$30

This Kickstarter-backed project is now available on the Drivethru

RPG website. Written with a special focus on young DMs aged twelve and up, its friendly and straightforward advice helps them create a fantasy dungeon crawl their players will love.



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## Extra Life: Aiding Miracles, Granting Wishes

Early details of our Extra Life 2018 events to benefit the Children's Miracle Network Hospitals, plus Mark Bonington chats with Nolan Whale about his amazing new creature, the oblex.

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### Extra Life 2018

It's true—we play a lot of Dungeons & Dragons, both in front of the cameras on Twitch.tv/dnd and also behind the scenes. But there's nothing more satisfying than playing D&D to raise money for kids! This year, the D&D Team is participating once again with Extra Life—helping bring the community together to benefit Children's Miracle Network Hospitals – and we wanted to share some of the activities we have planned.

Last year we expanded our efforts, livestreaming games over the entire weekend of the Game Day, as well as adding several projects to the DMs Guild in support of Extra Life including [The Turtle Package](#) and [The Lost Kenku](#) (both still available!). All donations went toward this extremely worthy cause—and for 2018, we’re expanding our efforts even further.

In fact, our efforts are already underway! On July 28th, Luke Gygax organized the inaugural [Founders and Legends Day](#), as a celebration of the men and women that pioneered role-playing games—with the livestreamed games connected directly to Extra Life fundraising. If you donated or participated then, thank you.

But we’re not done yet....

- Look for more D&D livestream games taking place on Extra Life’s Game Day, Saturday November 3rd. In fact, we’ll look to dedicate our entire week of programming to the effort, culminating once again at Gamehole Con in Madison, Wisconsin.
- In addition, we’ll be contributing further projects to the DMs Guild – including a special *Dragon+* adventure concerning an alternate expedition into the Barrier Peaks.
- D&D Extra Life t-shirts will be available for sale – if they’re not already by the time this issue launches, look for them soon!

As always, we greatly appreciate your participation. Be sure to check back regularly at our [Extra Life 2018 page](#) for further details—and please consider donating or even joining up, at any time!

*Note:* For a look back at 2017’s Extra Life games, you can watch the collection on [Twitch.tv/dnd](#). And in *Dragon+* Issue 17, you can also find the [character sheet](#) for participant Kennedy O’Day’s Ranger!

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## Oozing with Talent

Deep within the depths of the Underdark, colonies of mind flayers perform unspeakable experiments. Not just on humanoid unfortunate enough to be captured, but on the fungi and plants that dwell alongside them in the eternal darkness.

The spawn of one such experiment is the oblex. These cunning jellies

stalk the dark corridors of the underworld, harvesting fresh victims for their masters. Feeding on the thoughts and memories of those they catch in their slimy embrace, they can conjure copies of the victim to fool and deceive.

**Yet the real mind which gave birth to this horror isn't a mind flayer at all, but 18-year-old Nolan Whale of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. How did he conjure up such an evil creation?**

"I'm part of a small group of friends and we like to play D&D every week. They became fearless of everything because they'd either played against it already or looked it up," he explains. "So I thought I could throw them a curveball by creating a new monster that could be used in several different ways. Why not make something that's legitimately terrifying and can duplicate people's memories almost perfectly? I thought that would bring a lot of distrust and paranoia between the members of the party so I can't wait to use one for the first time with my group."

**Terrifying indeed. So where did the inspiration come from?**

"It just came to me when I was making the creature at Wizards of the Coast," he tells *Dragon+*. "I hadn't planned out what my monster was going to be until we arrived and started talking about it. I asked them what there was a complete lack of and the answer was, 'Oozes.' So I thought I'd make one of those. After that, we simply started piling on the ideas."

**Nolan's journey to creating his very own monster at Wizards of the Coast started two years ago. Diagnosed with GPA Vasculitis, he and his family worked to put the symptoms into remission. When that didn't happen, they contacted the Make-A-Wish Foundation.**

"The kids are often too young or too sick to talk to the Make-A-Wish staff properly but I took the chance to sit down with them and tell them everything I wanted to do," Nolan says. "I think they were a little surprised—maybe they were expecting me to be one of those kids who wanted to go to Disney World! But this was the first time they'd ever had someone request a visit to Wizards of the Coast for D&D. So I thought, 'Oh boy, I'm setting the bar!'"

**Nolan recalls his day at the offices of Wizards of the Coast with relish.**



“When I showed up, Chris Perkins was in the lobby. I didn’t expect to see him straight off and I looked at my parents in disbelief. I was jumping up and down like a little kid! It was an absolutely amazing experience. After getting inside and being introduced I was given a temporary employee tag with permissions and everything, along with a welcome package with some of the company material.

“We had a tour and I got to see what the D&D section looked like. While I went off to play D&D my family went off to play board games. I got more time to talk to everyone during that gaming session—we actually spent more time talking than playing! But it was a very fun experience.

“After lunch, I had the chance to create the monster, including the rules, with Chris and some of the other writers. I then worked on some of the artwork, and that was pretty much the day. I was exhausted at the end, but it was amazing and it really changed me.

“I was humbled to have that chance and it was the most incredible experience. It brought me to tears, truly. I think one of the biggest highlights was just getting to meet everybody and seeing the passion they have for their work. From what I can tell, everyone at Wizards really loves what they do.

“They didn’t care about scrapping things and starting over to get it right. When I sat down to do sketches with the artists, they didn’t mind if they had to get a fresh piece of paper. And if they screwed up a small part of the creature, they just started again. They only wanted to build off it and improve. That’s something I looked at as being very inspiring and it’s something I always take to heart now. Rather than just trying to complete something, I try to think how I can make it better.”

### **The experience clearly left a mark, so would he consider a career creating new D&D experiences?**

“I would love to write and I would take that opportunity in a heartbeat,” he enthuses. “For now, I’m going to be going to the University of Pittsburgh to study psychiatry. So if my writing career doesn’t pan out, I’ll be able to practise that and help people.

“For me it’s all about the writing as that’s something I really love. I’m actually terrible with art—stick figures are about the best I can

do. But once I start writing I feel like I could keep going until I'd filled a book. When I get into it, my dedication overflows. Maybe a little too much."

**Misgivings about his art style aside, Nolan's creativity and imagination are obvious. Having already given us the oblox, we were keen to discover some of his other favorite D&D monsters.**

"Back in 3.5 edition I adored the dragons," he confesses. "That's when I really fell in love with them. They had the ability to cast magic and do all these other things. Currently in fifth edition dragons don't have spellcasting, but I tend to home brew that aspect of them as I loved it.

"The mind flyers I always thought were cool. And I really appreciate how the githyanki and the githzerai came around, that was really interesting. But gnolls are one of my favorite common enemies, just because of how different they are compared to a lot of the others. Orcs and goblins you see often. But gnolls, they can be super common or rare; they can be scavengers or a war band. There is so much about this race that you can do. Nobody gives a thought to how dangerous a race they would be if somebody were to partner with them or unite them.

"I also love the giants. Fire giants are my absolute favorite. I love how they are clad in this big black plate, that they have this fiery hair and view skill and craftsmanship with metal above everything else. I didn't know they had such a complex society until I read about it in *Storm King's Thunder*. I only thought of them as NPCs before but I love learning about the creatures and going deeper. Every time I open a D&D book I learn something new. I start connecting to the different worlds and that's when I start planning little events to torture my friends in game!"

**Because while he enjoys D&D as a player for the most part, Nolan also likes switching to the other side of the DM's screen.**

"It's sometimes hard to find a good day for DMing, but I absolutely love it," he says. "I always feed off the reactions I get from my players. I go into lots of extra detail with everything; describing how everything looks and where it is, and if it radiates an actual effect.

"I try to show the players off as heroes who have these special

powers, rather than just being ordinary people within a world of chaos. And I always really enjoy seeing the excitement—or the terror—after the players meet a terrible boss monster.”

“When it comes to playing I love being able to have that adventure with your friends—or with complete strangers, because in the end they’ll become your friends—just like how your character will in the party. Through having adventures and cracking mysteries, you strengthen those human connections, creating deeper friendships or new ones. I think that’s the true essence of a game like D&D.”

**Nolan is a strong ambassador for the game, not only willing to talk about how it has enriched his own life, but also discussing how D&D can be a powerful tool for helping other people.**

“Playing D&D is a great way to help someone with really bad social anxiety issues to make friends,” he says. “Instead of just a game that is a ton of fun, it can be a very beneficial to those who have trouble being social for one reason or another.

“It’s a wonderful way to meet new people and of seeing how they think and do things differently. In that way, it’s like going out in the world and learning how different everyone is.”

**The fruits of Nolan’s labors, the terrifying oblox, can now be seen in *Mordenkainen’s Tome of Foes*.**

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## Minion Mayhem

*Minions 2* director Kyle Balda looks at the orc-like history of his bumbling yellow characters and presents D&D versions you can use in your game!

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**L**ovable and mischievous, the Minions were an instant hit with audiences when they were first introduced in the animated adventure, *Despicable Me*. Since then they've appeared in two further films with the nefarious Gru (voiced brilliantly by Steve Carrell) and been spun off into their own movie.

As yellow as the bananas they love to eat, each Minion has its own characteristics and is distinct from its friends. While they were always going to be individually recognizable, their overall look was initially much closer to something you might come across in a tavern in Faerûn.

“The original Minions looked much more like orcs when they were being developed. They were these huge monsters with all kinds of armor and battle axes and each one looked different,” director Kyle Balda tells *Dragon+*.

“There were two reasons we didn't go that way. The first is that it

would be really expensive to create all those different characters. But the more important reason is that they weren't as much fun as these cute little guys who do stupid things. Gru was this gruff, curmudgeonly character and the Minions were there to provide a comedic element as a nice balance to him.”

Having watched the Minions travel the globe in search of a villain in their first movie, it's interesting to wonder how they would fit into the world of D&D. Would they latch onto a worthy scoundrel they think is cool, or go solo and start practicing their own evil deeds?



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“The thing that’s always been ironic about the Minions is that they



want to follow a bad guy but there's nothing evil or bad about them whatsoever. They just think that's what they want," Balda says.

"They are attracted to what looks powerful and dark but when it comes down to it they're not able to do much. For them, doing something bad is like slap-fighting or dropping a water balloon on somebody's head. That's the Mount Everest of the most evil deed they could do."

Although he wasn't the only mind behind their creation, *Dragon+* can't help wondering if the Minions are drawn to darkness because Balda himself used to lean in that direction, as he admits he also had a fascination for the villains in his youth. "Especially Asmodeus," he recalls. "He was one that always sparked my imagination. But the artwork showing all the varied monsters was really an entry point to D&D for me."

## Youthful Endeavours

Balda played Dungeons & Dragons for three or four years as a boy, before rediscovering the game a little over a year ago. To jumpstart those early adventures, his parents actually bought him both the fabled "red box" starter set and a later edition.

"I didn't understand at the time if they were the same game or if they were different games, because one had way more simple rules. But I loved looking through the *Player's Handbook* at all the artwork. Especially *A Paladin in Hell*, fighting all the demons, as I was always drawing knights and that kind of thing.

"One of my favorite pastimes as a kid was to draw mine and my friends' D&D characters or dungeon maps. Even if I would never DM anyone through those maps, it was fun to create these crazy labyrinths."



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Balda lists Ralph Bakshi's *The Lord of the Rings* and Ray Harryhausen's *Clash of the Titans* among his early influences, although he admits he didn't know he wanted to be an animator at that young age. "I just understood that I was surrounded by this magical medium, even if I didn't understand how it worked. And then Dungeons & Dragons was a way to play with story. But all of it completely unconsciously—it was just fun and I never imagined there would be threads linking from it to my professional life someday."

His early attempts at being a Dungeon Master were similarly unconscious and he's aware that he took on the role without completely understanding what he was doing.

"I just knew it was a storytelling position," he tells *Dragon+*. "But that's what I was much more interested in back then, and it's definitely what I'm more interested in now than being a player. It's funny that would be the attractive thing because there's so much preparation and work that goes into being a DM. It's really similar to filmmaking in a lot of ways with everything that goes into it.

"But watching what people do in a situation and how they problem solve when you have all the answers right behind your screen is fun.

Then they'll come up with a solution that is something you could never have imagined and you have to roll with that—it's like improv theatre where everyone is making the story together.”

## Boys' Knight

Thanks to his love for running adventures as a DM, Balda has only played D&D a few times. His first time was during his introduction to the game, when his cousin acted as a freestyle DM and made up a completely improvised adventure. The same cousin also lent Balda his character, which was a paladin and played into the director's love of knights. Rolling the set of strange-looking dice was another fascination.



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“I was hooked. We were telling this story together and my imagination was active enough that it was like being in a movie or



creating your own film. At that point there were so many fewer types of media to feed your imagination. If I wanted to see an animated film I'd have to wait a few years between when they came out and only then could you get this most fantastic view on something. Now it's everywhere and there's a new animated movie or a super-special effects movie coming out about every six weeks.

"Yet the game is thriving more than it ever has, which is interesting because it's such an analog thing and everyone's simply making it up themselves. It really touches people from all kinds of backgrounds and interests because it speaks to your own imagination. It's almost like this psychodrama where you get to act out stuff that you normally wouldn't be able to. It's cathartic."

## Movie Magic

Hopefully there'll still be time to slip in plentiful gaming sessions while the second *Minions* movie is being produced. Balda has already completed 15 months of pre-production in the US and has moved to Paris for the official start of filming on *Minions 2*.

He'll be stationed at the Illumination Mac Guff studios for two years during that time. Awash with creativity, its walls are covered with pop culture pictures and drawings to inspire the writers and animators.

"There are also lots of toys. It's funny because my wife Janet and I went to the Wizards of the Coast offices and walked around and it had a really similar feel to it, with the way people there have little figures and toys all around."

Currently working from a script, the Illumination team have started building the digital sets and doing some early layout for the film, which is released in two years.

"It's actually a short schedule compared to a lot of animated films. It's pretty speedy," he says. "But it's great because every day there's a new puzzle to put together and there's so many moving parts and things are happening at the same time. Certain parts are still in story development while other parts are being animated. So it's like this beast that's coming together and wakes up one day."

# Minion Building

While Balda and his team work to bring the Minions alive once more, the director has also joined forces with *Dragon+* to help you do the same! Below you'll find the stats you need to add these creatures to your own game, with the kind of scores for Intelligence and Wisdom you might have expected.

“They would have such poor judgement or such a terrible perception of what is actually happening that they would misunderstand a lot of situations,” Balda says. “They could be completely confused and follow somebody who was good just because they looked like they had a skull decoration on their costume or horns like a tiefling. And the tiefling would be completely annoyed by them because they have no intention of doing anything evil.



(Select to view)

“But at the same time, they are very charming and very resilient concerning the amount of abuse that they can take and give out to one another. The thing that is fun with them is that if you put them in a situation they come alive. So if you're storyboarding them they tell

you what they want to do in a way as you're drawing them. We used the minions a lot for the marketing of *Despicable Me*, putting them in situations and there was something really organic about it.

“I think people connect with the Minions because they are able to project so much onto them. I love Peter Sellers movies and the thing that's funny about watching one of those is that you're seeing him make really poor choices and things that are going to get him into trouble but you have so much empathy for the character.

“The brilliant voice work for the minions by Pierre Coffin is not meant to be a discernible language. If someone is speaking a language that you don't understand, you are forced to watch their body language even closer and what's communicated there happens on a more emotional level, rather than an intellectual one. I hope that's what is happening with the Minions.”

**MINION STATS HERE**

**Minions 2 is released in cinemas on 3 July 2020.**

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# MINION

A minion is a small, yellow-skinned humanoid that has either one or two eyes. They are often found in packs ranging from dozens to hundreds of minions, though groups as small as three sometimes undertake select missions. They speak their own language, seemingly composed of words and phrases borrowed from many tongues. While minions are chaotic neutral by nature (with a strong emphasis on chaotic), their strongest desire is to provide service to the greatest evil leader in any given area.



## MINION

*Small humanoid, chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 12

**Hit Points** 11 (2d6 + 4)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	4 (-3)	3 (-4)	15 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Con +4, Cha +4

**Skills** Stealth +4

**Senses** passive Perception 6

**Languages** Minion, understands Common but doesn't speak it  
**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Pack Tactics.** The minion has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the minion's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

**Strategy Degeneration.** Whenever a minion misses on a melee attack roll by 5 or more, it automatically hits a random ally within 5 feet of it. If that ally is also a minion, that minion's next attack targets the minion that hit it.

**Convulsive Laughter.** A minion that can see another creature fail by 5 or more on an attack roll, Strength check, Dexterity

check, Strength saving throw, or Dexterity saving throw must make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the minion is overcome by hysterical laughter, suffering the effect of its own Tickle attack.

**Contagious Laughter.** Any creature that starts its turn able to see or hear five or more minions under the effect of Convulsive Laughter must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or be subject to the effect of a minion's Tickle attack.

**Tasty Temptation.** A minion has disadvantage on any ability check or saving throw that involves being tempted by food.

## ACTIONS

**Slap.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.  
*Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

**Tickle.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.  
*Hit:* The target must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or be overcome by hysterical laughter for 1 minute, becoming incapacitated and unable to stand up for the duration. The target can make a new saving throw at the end of each of its turns and each time it takes damage, ending the effect on itself with a success.

**Fart (Recharge 5–6).** The minion fires noxious fumes in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the end of their next turn.





## With Age Comes Wisdom: Crone's Crucible

DM Ruth Robertson adds a dash of maturity to our issue focusing on younger gamers. Having first played D&D while it was still being developed, she's now part of the livestreaming community and is better known as the Crone (but you can call her Granny Perkins).

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**S**eventy-one-year-old DM Ruth Robertson (AKA the Crone from the *Crone's Crucible* livestream) has been playing Dungeons & Dragons almost as long as it's been possible to play D&D. Having gone back to college to add an engineering degree to the liberal arts path she'd gone down, a double-take at an advert on a telephone pole in 1972 kick started a lifelong passion.

"It was normal to have signs up

saying that a psych student needed people to come in and be test subjects. And I walked past one of these and then doubled back because the sign said, 'Need test subjects for a game based on Tolkien'. I was a wild Tolkien fan—I'd memorized some of it and can still quote it. So I saw this sign and thought, 'That sounds *really* interesting.'"



Ruth Robertson

When she turned up for the test, it turned out not to be a psych experiment but a group of guys playing a game. As this was on the West Coast and Dungeons & Dragons co-creators Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson were in the middle of the country, Robertson is still not sure how they got hold of the game.

"But I didn't care what their connection was because I didn't even know who Gary Gygax was at that time. There were two of them running things and they called themselves captains, and they taught all of us this game. Four o'clock in the morning and we're still playing our characters in the apartment. I have been into D&D ever since."

Born in California and working there for many years in the aerospace industry, Robertson now lives in Oklahoma City. During that time she's gone from not knowing who Gygax was to fostering a personal family connection.

"I talk with Luke Gygax, as my son-in-law is in the military with him and they've been going through classes at the same grade and level and are both majors. Luke has been working on treating PTSD using D&D techniques and it's really interesting to watch him developing that."

## Heroic Beginnings

Robertson fondly remembers her first forays into D&D, when dungeons were designed on sheets of notebook paper, squeezing on

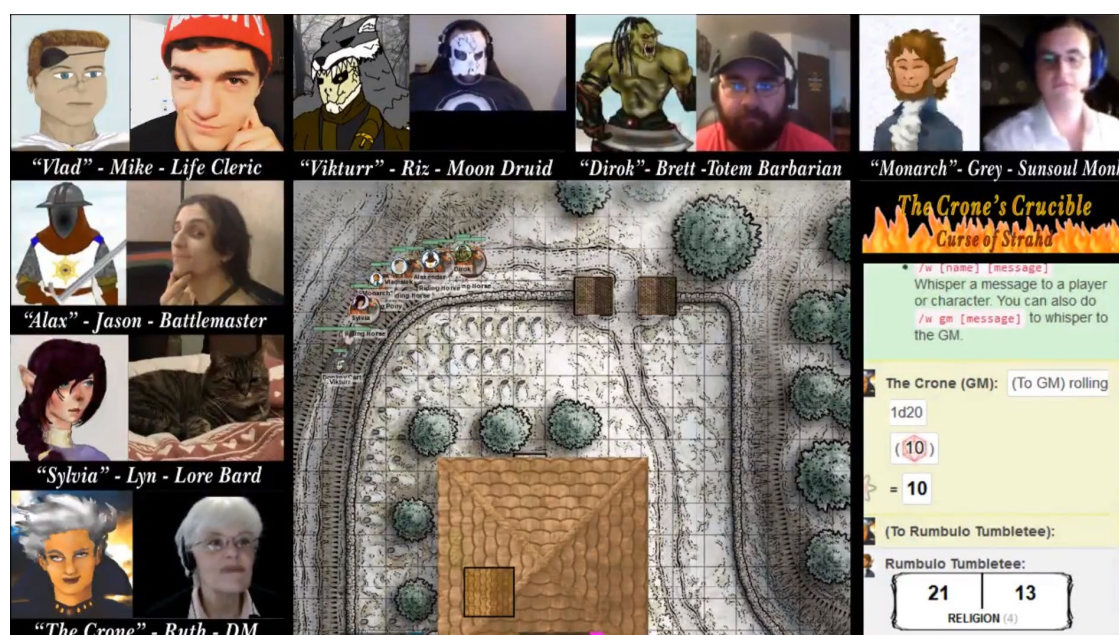


as many square rooms as would fit. These would be placed on a sewing board on the floor and buttons moved around the squares to symbolize the characters. The first of those buttons was a courageous paladin.

“I was very much into the heroics at that point. But my character got killed off fairly quickly and I decided to make an evil mage,” Robertson says. “I had a terrible time levelling him up because in those days it was really hard with a mage.

“I made him evil because I wanted to see how a character like that would work. We had a paladin in that group who kept casting *detect evil* and the DM would say, ‘You detect evil!’ And it took two weeks of game time for them to realize it was me they were detecting, at which point they all turned on me and killed me.”

Moving to Oxnard a few years later, Robertson continued playing magic-users and created a sorceress—although this one lasted a little longer.



Crone's Crucible livestream (select to view)

“That was the longest-living of my early characters and she had quite a history. I drew her out the whole nine yards,” she remembers.

“There was a DM there who played the wildest games. He was the greatest. He came up with some of the most unusual ideas and would create these amazing traps.

“One of these magnified your highest characteristic but in a bizarre way. Mine was Charisma and when it became magnified she wound up having chinchilla fur growing out of her. She couldn’t get anywhere near town or all the guys would be following after her. He did the most bizarre things, so I really loved that game.”

## Dungeon Mastery

Having experienced D&D as a player for around ten years, Robertson stepped up to become a Dungeon Master when called upon. Having moved to a community where there were lots of people playing D&D, she realized they didn’t really have a DM and decided to give it a try. At first she focused on the basics.

“I didn’t do any wide world stuff, it was very much: ‘You’re at the door of the dungeon. Here you go, there’s a bunch of rooms.’ Of course it was all theatre of the mind in those days, there wasn’t anything else. I limped along with my first attempts but I loved the storytelling and doing the descriptions. In my mind I’m hearing suspenseful music behind the scenes as I’m doing it. It’s been wonderful to move from that to an electronic format where you can have an 8,000-mile-diameter tabletop, which gives you a lot more opportunity.”

In those early games, she remembers the experienced players stepping in to help when she didn’t know a rule. Since then she’s gleaned a lot from other livestreams, devouring everything from *Missclicks* and *Critical Role* to *Dice, Camera, Action!*

“I have watched all the back videos of Chris Perkins and have really learned a lot from him. He throws so many more challenges at his players than I was doing. And I began to realize that they will rise to the challenges you give them. Now my players are starting to refer to me as Granny Perkins because I’ve been throwing some really mean stuff at them.”

## Living the Stream

Robertson admits it was her players who pushed her into livestreaming, with a little help from her own family. “I thought nobody wants to see a granny livestreaming, and when my players finally got me interested I didn’t really have the equipment for it. So

at Christmas my kids dropped a professional mic, a good video camera, the whole nine yards on me and said, 'Now you've got no excuses.' I came home, set them all up, told the players and we jumped right into it.”

She describes her players as a “wonderful, creative bunch” of mostly twenty to thirty-somethings who are longtime friends from RPGs, plus one of her grandsons, who’s now eighteen.

“Their amazing co-op storytelling is part of the wonderful scenarios we have. Now I’m working on getting them all into cosplay so that should be interesting. Some of them are still camera shy but little by little I’ve tried to bring them along. My cosplay will be easiest as the crone. I’ve got one of those D&D hoodies that comes over and shadows my face, so all I need are vampire fangs and I’m set.”

Still, there’s a big jump between having the equipment and starting to use it properly. She describes the initial learning curve as being “out of sight above my head”.

“I really envy the big boys with the tech teams because I am everything: tech, broadcaster, DM, makeup artist. And there are times in the game when I’m looking all over trying to figure out where something got lost. So it can get pretty challenging with the technology. I’ve got four screens—three on my computer and one on the laptop—so that’s a lot to look at.”

It can be a far cry from professional streams, which often have staff looking after the cameras, the sound and even the chat in the corner of the screen.

“We might have a couple of people who will tune in and moderate and that will help a lot. There’s a lot going on all at the same time and I’m pretty good at multitasking, thank goodness. But if there’s something that people ask that would really add to the game, I would like to know.”

## Child Friendly

On top of her livestream game, Robertson also runs a weekly D&D session for her grandkids. She’s a big believer in getting children to play the game.



“I taught my kids how to play as early as I could and I’m teaching my grandkids now because it’s great for problem solving. The first few games it’s: ‘I didn’t roll right, I want to roll again.’ ‘Sorry. Life gives you lemons sometimes. Now that you’ve made this bad roll what are you going to do about it?’

“And you bring them along. Now you’re at a point where it’s, ‘Oh phooey, I rolled bad. Well, here’s what I do.’ And you see them open up to the descriptions. At first they want to see it. Then they start to get with the idea of seeing it in their mind and you watch as their imaginations expand and improve over time.”

To start them off, she used the *Lost Mine of Phandelver* scenario from the Starter Set. But she suggests if other DMs looking to include children don’t want to use something pre-made, they should create something based on the real-world influences of those kids.

“If they’re into Pokémon, My Little Pony, Ninja Turtles or whatever, make a scenario based on that. That will help them really get into their characters and you can make a story that suits whatever level those kids are at. You can then control it until they begin to learn more difficult things as they go along.

“I honestly believe that in my seventies I’m still going like I am largely because of the way my mind works from playing D&D. And the youth keeps me young.”

**You can see DM Ruth Robertson test her adventurers every Sunday night at 8.30pm Eastern time by tuning into the [Crone's Crucible livestream](#) . Collected episodes can then be found on [her YouTube Channel](#) .**

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# Boss Battles

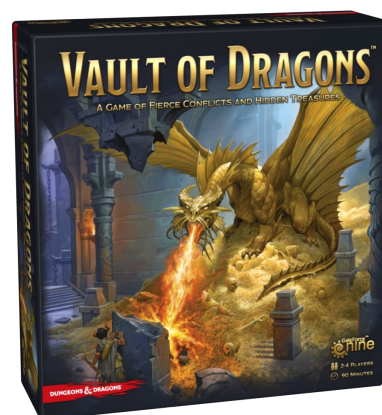
The creator of *Vault of Dragons* on how the board game puts a whole new spin on *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*.

**“I**’m blessed by the fact that I’m a gamer who owns a gaming company,” says John-Paul Brisigotti, the CEO of Gale Force Nine and a veteran player who has been rolling dice and moving figures around boards since the ’80s. “Some things you just have to make because they’re cool.”



One such “cool” thing is *Vault of Dragons*, a board game counterpart to the *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* D&D adventure. Rather than trying to thwart the plans of four major foes as they hunt for an enormous treasure, in the board game players instead control these big bads as they attempt to outmaneuver their opponents and expand their criminal reach.

“We’ve taken inspiration from the *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* setting and story, and we’re looking to create something that blends seamlessly with it while still being a standalone game. So the four factions that you’ll find in *Vault of Dragons* will already be familiar to those who have played *Dragon Heist*, but what’s interesting in our game is that you’ll be doing the opposite of what you were doing in the D&D adventure, because you’re now one of those bad guys!”



(Select to view)

In *Vault of Dragons*, players assume the role of the head of a faction as they compete for who gets to enter the dungeon and plunder the vault. Playing as Xanathar, Manshoon, Jarlaxle or one of the Cassalanthers, they’ll send minions out into the city to search for rumors, treasure and clues to the hoard’s location. Their forces will also brawl with other factions to control key locations and exploit them to their own ends—but beware the City Watch!



# Brains vs Brawl

“Not all disputes between the factions of Waterdeep can be settled with coin or conversation,” Brisigotti reveals. “In a fight, the player with the higher Attack Strength wins. However, modifiers and cards come into play too, with a host of weapons and special abilities to turn the tide of combat. While brute strength certainly talks loudly in the underworld of Waterdeep, it isn’t the only way to win a fight.”

If the guild heads are to be successful in their efforts to learn of the vault’s location and try to stake their claim, they’ll also need their minions to recover valuable treasures and powerful magic items. Because no-one goes into the Undermountain naked if they want to survive!



(Select to view)

“Beware, you’ll need to send your followers in well-armed to be in with a chance of claiming the loot,” he warns. “The deeper you go into Waterdeep’s mysteries, the more casualties you’re likely to suffer.”

The winner is the first player to claim the hidden vault of gold. Before players can try their hand at traversing the dangers (and reaping the rewards) of the dungeon, they must first reveal it.

“A player who collect three Secrets can reveal the vault’s location without paying the usual Yawning Portal fee. But once the vault is open, any player who can front the entrance fee is free to try their hand and face the dangers lurking beneath,” he explains.

“Most D&D games, you’re playing as the good guys in a world where a lot of bad is happening. The fact that this is about a power-

grab to become the top bad guy is another fun play on the good guy/bad guy thing!”

## City Limits

“What makes this such an exciting project is that D&D is being talked about in a new way these days,” says Brisigotti. “Today’s players don’t play in the same way that older players like I did. Gaming has become a more social, casual experience, and the enemy is always time.”

*Vault of Dragons* isn’t the first board game that hopes to rework the RPG experience, but Brisigotti enjoys switching up the rules of what players will expect from a D&D game. Does he think it can help further connect board gamers and D&D players?

“That’s the tick box we’re trying to achieve, absolutely. We’re actually looking to appeal to the board gamers first and we hope that the D&D players will follow in the months after their groups have finished enjoying the *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* adventure. But it will be interesting to see how the board game world absorbs it.



(Select to view)

“There is no doubt that the quality of board games out there is as high as it has ever been, but so is the competition,” he explains. “This year over 700 board games will get released in the United States, which rises to over 1,000 when you add in Europe’s input. It’s absolutely about choice, so you have to help the players make that connection. Thanks partly to shows like *Stranger Things*, D&D is very much in the mainstream, and seventeen to eighteen-year-olds are interested in trying it out. D&D fifth edition is attracting more players year on year, which is really exciting.”

As a father of two, Brisigotti has also seen the gaming habits of his own children adapt in recent years.

“What’s really wonderful is that it’s happened organically. My own kids are playing offline games with their friends without anybody reprimanding them. And it’s wonderful to see the younger generation finding the joy of sitting around a table and sharing a laugh over



cards or dice and using their brains in a different way,” he says.

“That shared imaginative experience has its own excitement, even when pitted against the multi-million dollar Hollywood movie budgets.”

## Core Beliefs

Brisigotti’s own time at the gaming table might have taken more of a back seat in the wake of both family and work life but he admits to getting his D&D fix by watching and listening to shows such as *Critical Role*. That hasn’t doused his affection for the hobby though, and he still pours that same enthusiasm into his work, making his input felt at every level of a product’s development.



(Select to view)

“I only take licenses of things we really like or have passion for,” he states. “I couldn’t make a *Rugrats* game because I’m not a *Rugrats* fan. If I was, I might. But I’m D&D to my core. When it comes to things like the design, when we sit down with Chris Perkins and Mike Mearls and say, ‘We’ve got some cool ideas’, I’m coming at it purely from a gamer perspective.

“We have to make our products work commercially to justify doing them but not everything we do is commercial. Sometimes it’s just that we’ve always wanted to make a particular thing. That’s the nice thing about D&D. Some things you just make because you can and you’re going to make a certain small group of people very happy. The passion and ideas D&D players have are never going to run out.”

And clearly, neither are Brisigotti’s.

***Vault of Dragons*** is released later this year and you can find more

details on the [Gale Force Nine website](#) or preorder a copy from the end of August by [clicking here](#).

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## Tutorials: Painting the Owlbear

RealmSmith's Jason Azevedo tackles the ferocious owlbear miniature from Nolzur's Marvelous Miniatures.

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The owlbear has always been one of my favorite creatures in the D&D mythos. A ferocious monstrosity that I very much enjoy pitting against my unsuspecting players. For that reason I'm excited to partner with WizKids and Vallejo on this early access tutorial, providing some simple techniques to take your owlbear mini to the next level.

### Our Approach

I want to replicate the color scheme from the owlbear entry in the *Monster Manual* as closely as possible: primarily a purple body with just a touch of brown in the fur down its back. I'm using a variety of techniques to paint the mini including drybrushing (which I'll explain later), as well as layered washes to provide subtle tinting of the



feathers and fur. For this tutorial I'm using paints from the Vallejo Game Color line.



### Prepping the Miniature

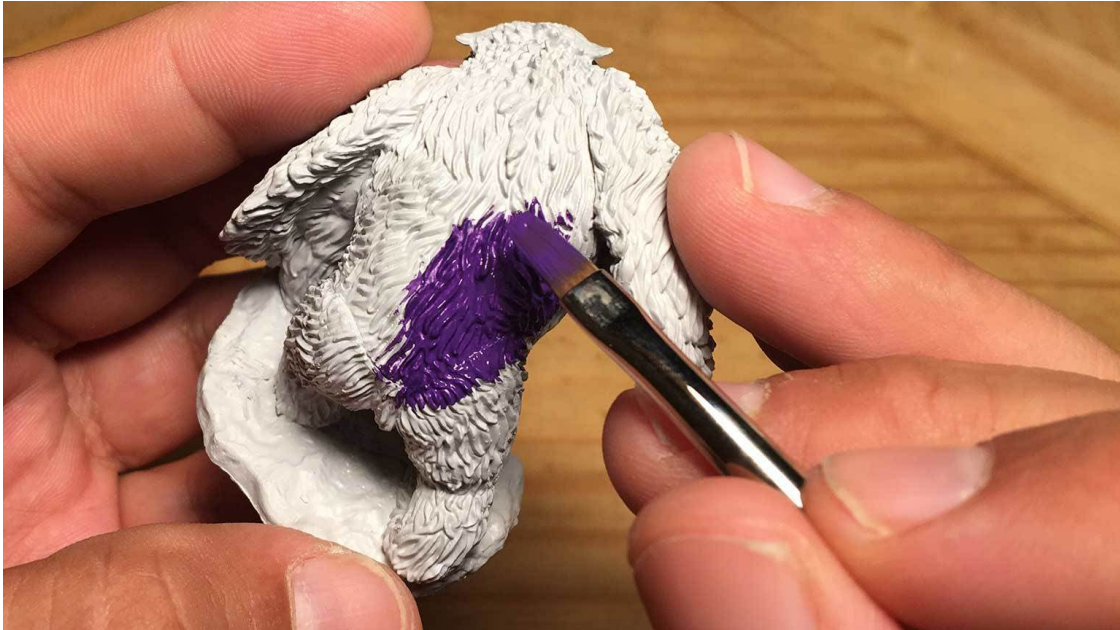
As this isn't a showcase miniature, I don't want to spend too much time on the preparation stage. All I really do is use a hobby knife to remove some of the mold lines that remain after production.

I often use the back edge of the hobby knife so as not to cut into the mini and to remove as little material as possible. One of the great things about WizKids' Nolzur's Marvelous miniatures line is that they come pre-primed with Vallejo Primer so I can skip that stage entirely.



## Feathers and Fur

As a rule of thumb I typically tackle the deepest recesses of a miniature first, working from the inside out. That way you're not messing up surface detail when trying to get into the hard to reach places. That isn't as much a concern on this mini as the majority of the body is the same color, so I start with the feathers and fur.



First I lay down a solid basecoat with Heavy Violet using a larger basecoat brush. The Vallejo Extra Opaque paints are designed specifically for laying down a solid coat in less passes and are perfect for this stage.



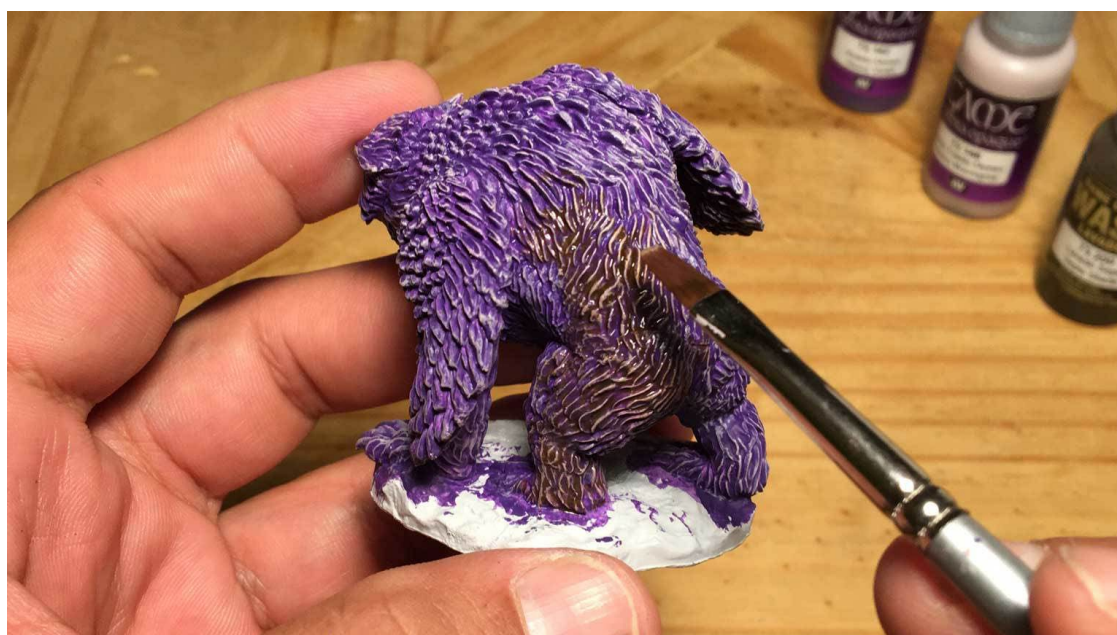


Once the basecoat is dry, I lay down a drybrush of Heavy Warmgrey to accentuate the feathers and fur. For the drybrush technique, I load my brush with paint and then wipe most of it off on a paper towel so that all that remains on the brush is a dry residue. Then using a sweeping motion over the miniature, I apply paint only to the highest detail on the fur and feathers. For this I use the Vallejo Toray P55.004 Drybrush.



### Applying Washes

The artwork in the *Monster Manual* shows a brownish tinge to the back and haunches of the owlbear, primarily anywhere there is fur rather than feathers.



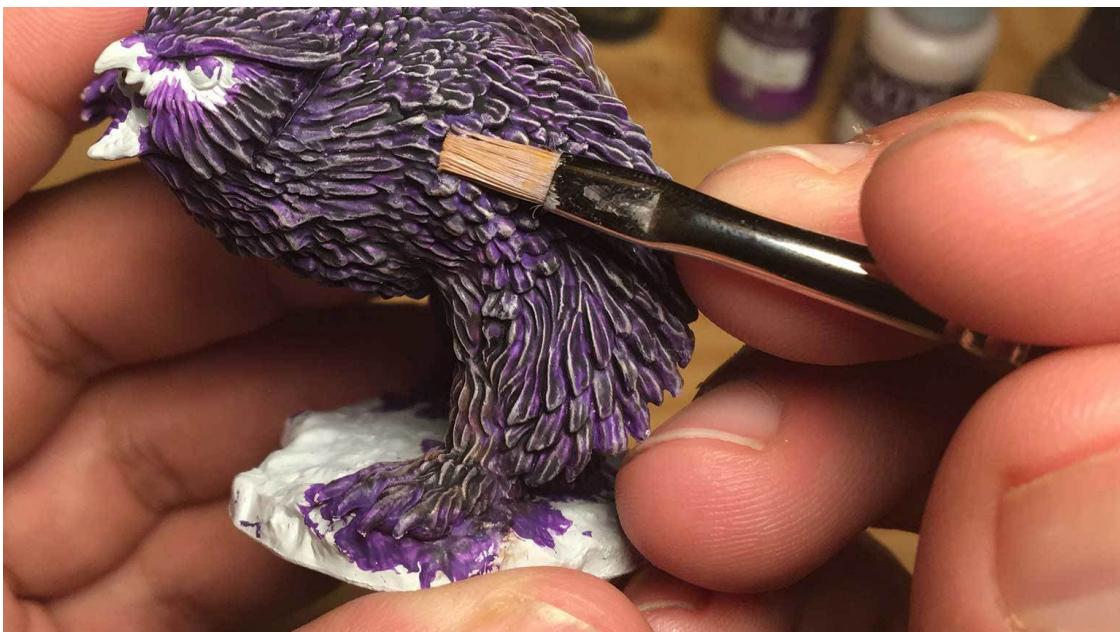


To accomplish this look I first apply a coat of Sepia Shade using the same brush I used for the basecoat. The Vallejo Game Color washes are designed to add shading and contrast by resting into the recesses to tint and create natural shadows.



I then apply Black Wash to all the feathered areas of the miniature in the same manner. Let the washes dry completely before moving onto the next step to ensure they don't bleed into the following color.

Next I add an additional light dry brush of Heavy Warmgrey all over the body.



Finally I do an all-over wash with Violet Ink which brings all the

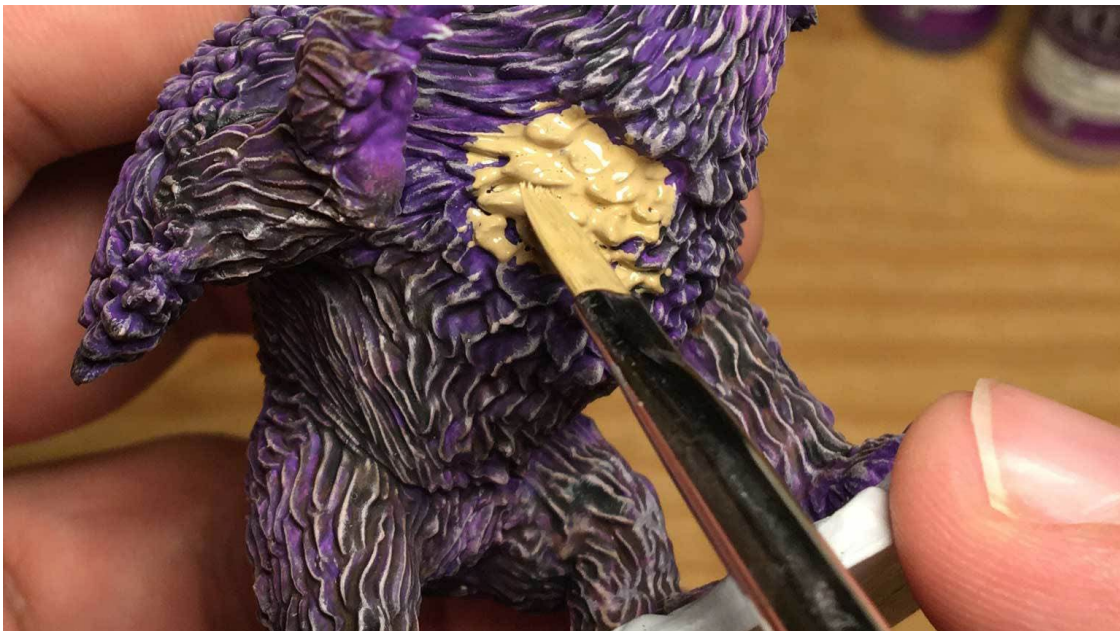
colors and washes back together. The Vallejo inks are designed to tint or colorize a surface rather than provide shadows like the washes do.

#### Face and Underbelly

To provide some contrast to the purple feathers, I decide to add a patch of light feathers to the owlbear's Underbelly, matching the coloration found on its face.



First, I apply a solid basecoat of Khaki to the face and underbelly, taking care to feather and blend the color as much as possible into the purple areas surrounding it.



Once that is dry, I apply Sepia Wash to those areas to add depth. As



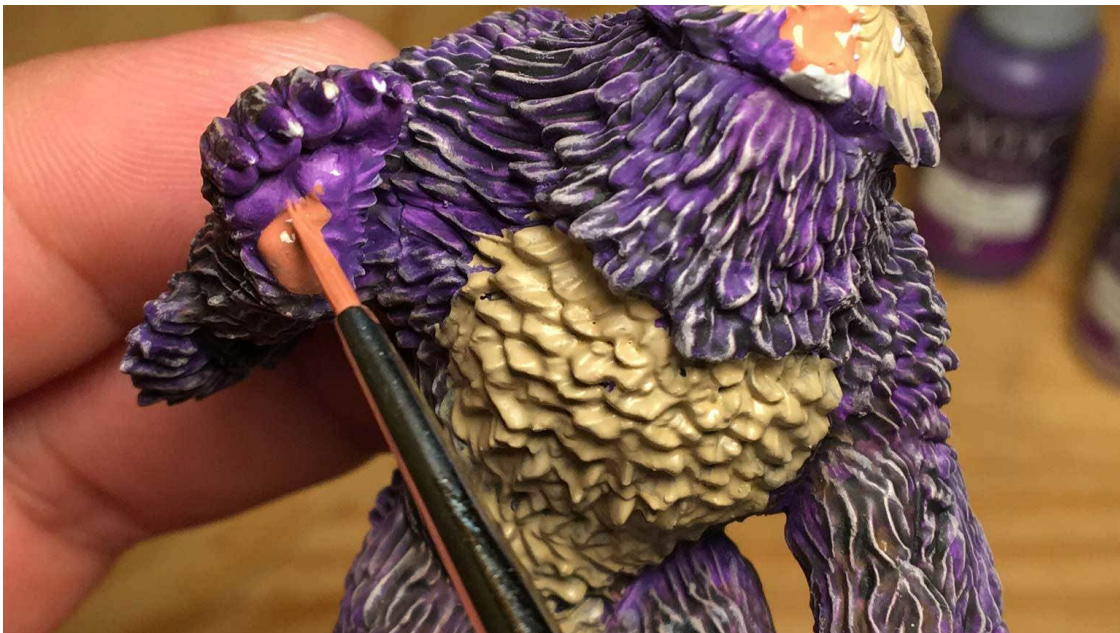
usual, let the wash dry completely before moving on.



Next, I drybrush some Bonewhite onto the feathers to create some highlights.

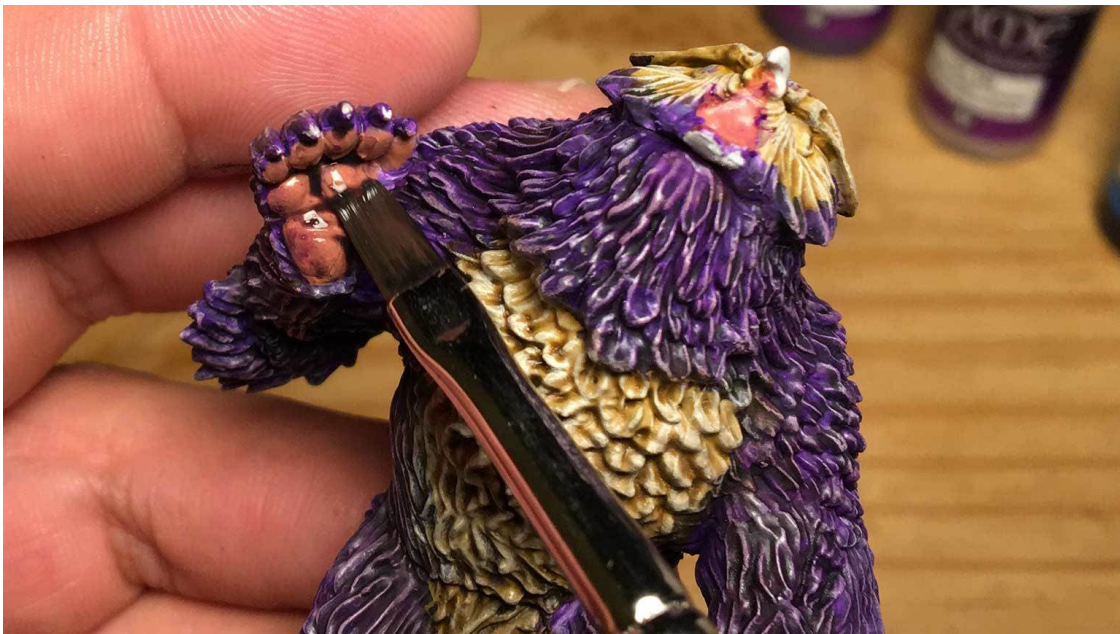
Mouth, paws and Eyelids

I use the same process for all the fleshy areas on the miniature: primarily the bottom of the paws and inside the mouth and eyelids. The first step is to basecoat all those areas with Tan.

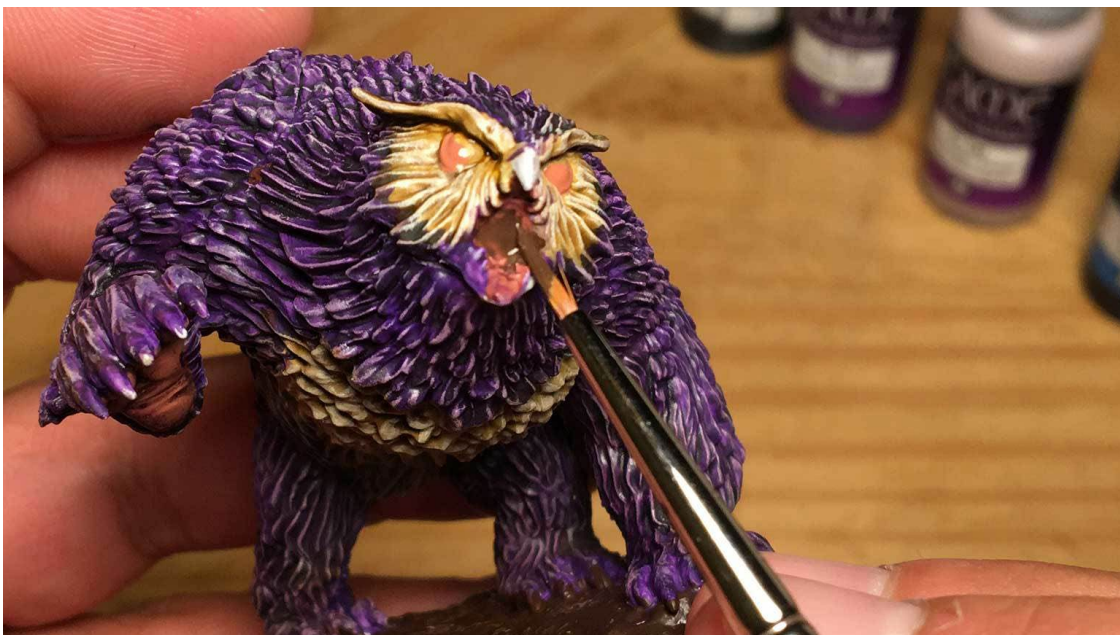


Then I apply a coat of Black Wash to add depth to all areas.





Finally, I paint some Charred Brown to the inside of the mouth to add further depth to that area.

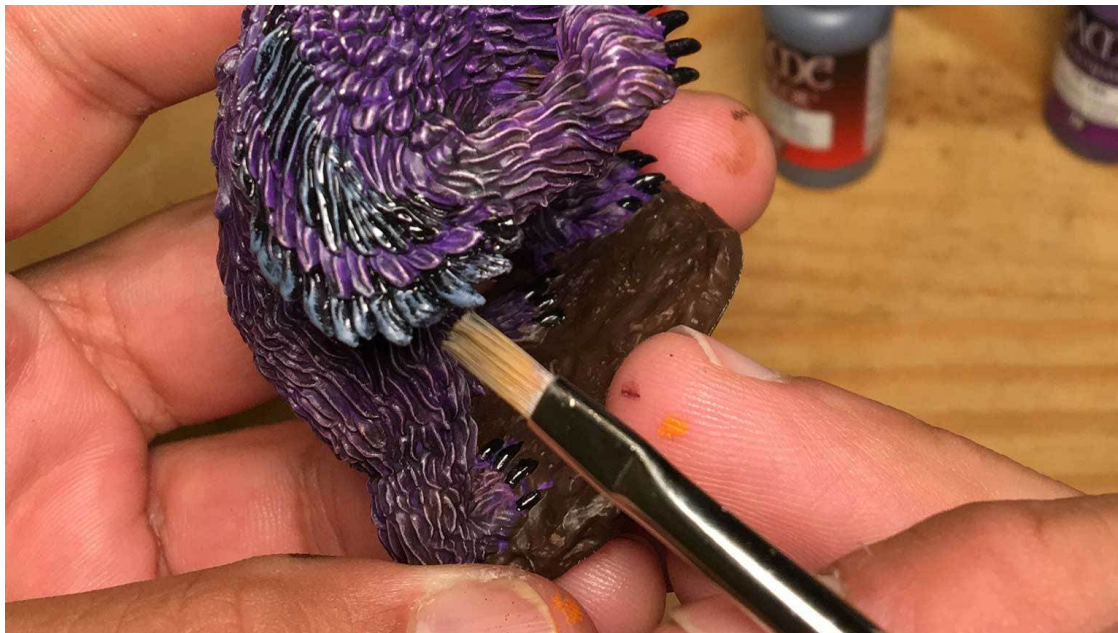


#### Eyes, Claws and Feathers

Painting the eyes and claws is a fairly straightforward step, and I use a Vallejo detail brush. I apply Black to basecoat all the claws, eyes and the darker feathers along the fringes.



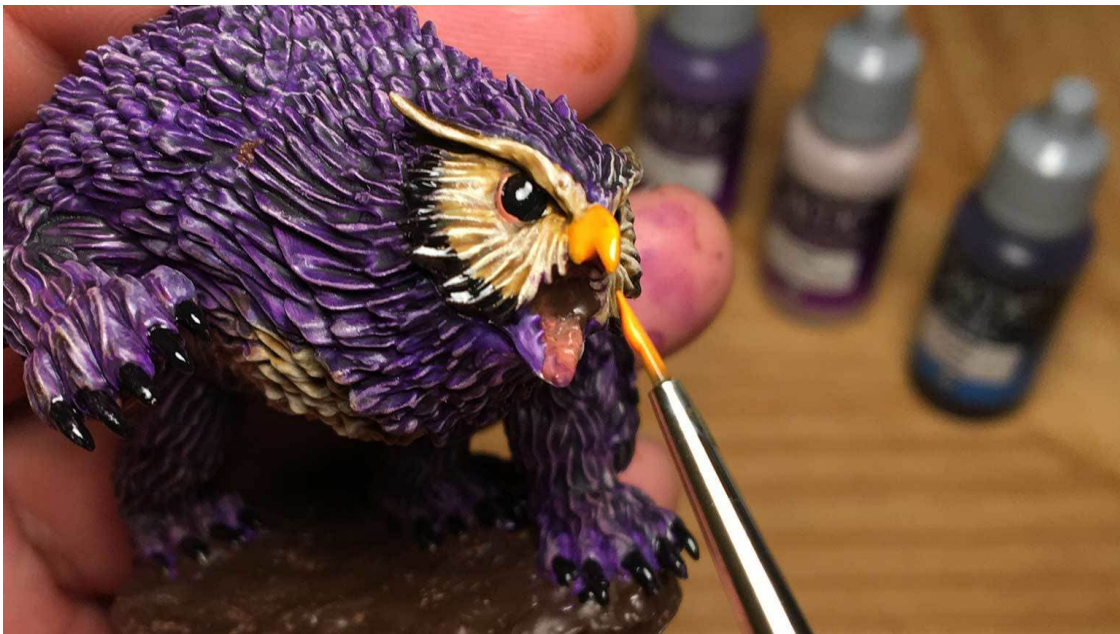
Then I use Sombre Grey to drybrush the feathers and the claws.



### Vicious Beak

The feature that I think brings it all together is the owlbear's signature toothy beak. I first basecoat the beak with Orange Fire. I find that it needs at least a couple coats as it goes on fairly thin.





I then add a first highlight using Gold Yellow, focusing everywhere but the deepest recesses of the beak.

Then I add one final highlight to the tips of the beak and the teeth along the side of the beak using Bonewhite.



#### Basing the Miniature

I'm taking a fairly restrained approach to this miniature's base so as to not detract from the creature itself. I simply want to add some grassy texture to test out one of Vallejo's Environmental Effects.

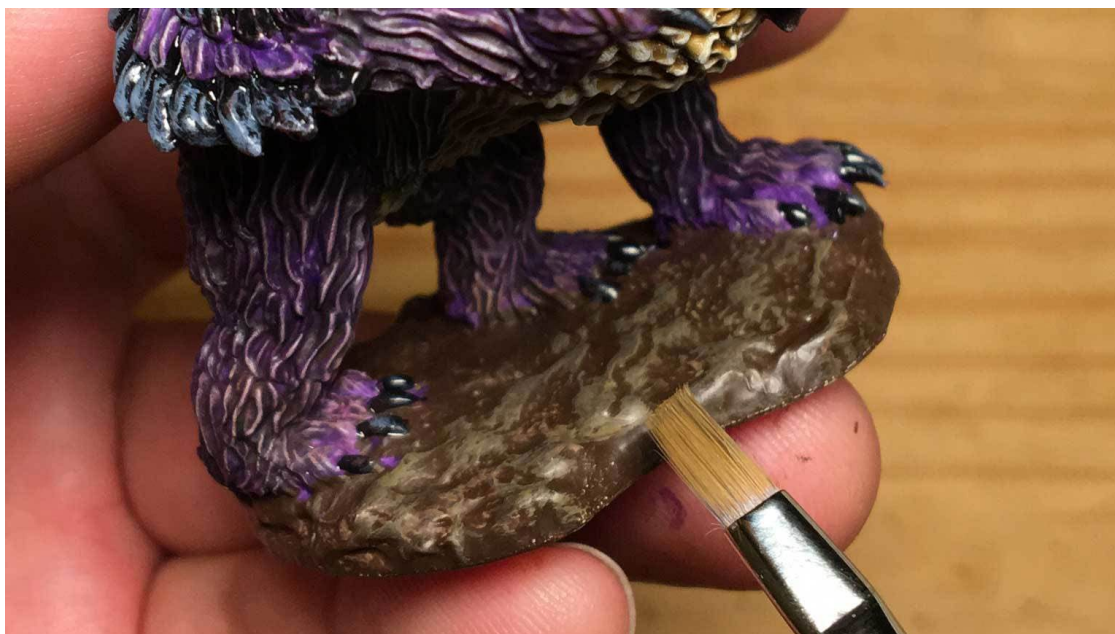
First, I apply a basecoat of Charred Brown to the base using my basecoat brush. Make sure to be careful around the paws and claws



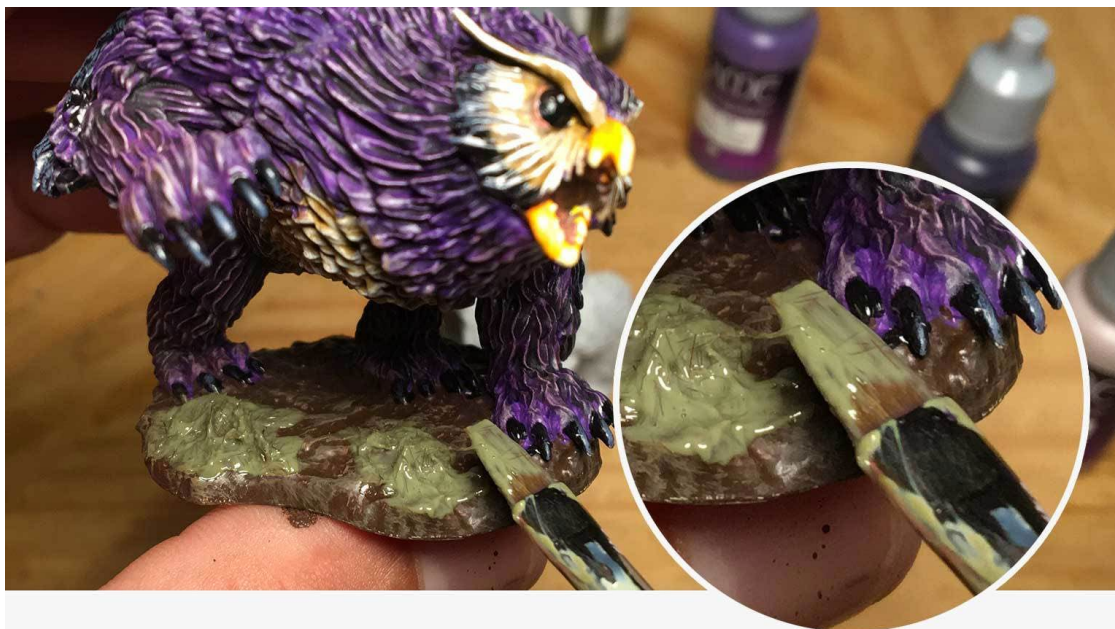
so that you don't mess up all the wonderful work you've already done.



Then apply a drybrush of Heavy Brown for the highlight.



Finally, apply some of the Crushed Grass Environmental Effects which basically consist of paint with static grass infused into it. I apply it in patchy clumps and make sure to pull my brush upward after each application so that the grass stands up on its end.



### Conclusion

All in all, the Nolzur's Marvelous Miniatures owlbear was a real pleasure to paint and a great project for a beginner to intermediate painter! Check out our upcoming owlbear tutorial series at [YouTube.com/realmsmith](https://www.youtube.com/realmsmith) for further ways to take your owlbear mini to the next level.

RealmSmith exists to inspire players and Dungeon Masters to get the most out of their tabletop experiences. Not only do we teach you how to create wonderful things, we then show you how to use them in our weekly D&D livestreams and even ship everything you need in our Encounter Crates each month!

You can check out our painting, crafting and terrain tutorials—including our acclaimed Beholder series—at [YouTube.com/realmsmith](https://www.youtube.com/realmsmith). Also be sure to look for the Nolzur's Marvelous Miniature owlbear by WizKids in our September Encounter crate featuring products from your favorite brands and an exclusive module by Absolute Tabletop at RealmSmith.tv. Welcome to our table!

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## Girls, Guts... In all Their Plastic Glory





You'll know Kelen Coleman (Dranishka), Sujata Day (Ichabod), Erika Fermina (Lala), Allie Gonino (Lilith), Alice Greczyn (Rowan), Kim Hidalgo (Fauna) and Rachel Seeley (Moirabetter as the livestream crew *Girls, Guts, Glory*. Their exploits are now so legendary there was nothing left to do but cast these adventurers in plastic and preserve them for all time. *Dragon+* found out what it takes to turn that character sheet and cosplay outfit into an epic mini figure.

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### **What input did you have into the creation of the miniatures?**

**Rachel Seeley** WizKids asked us all for a series of photos from different angles, capturing a stance or pose we thought would be appropriate for our characters and used those as a reference when making the minis.

**Alice Greczyn** We each posed in costume in our chosen character stance and they stayed true to what we sent them.

**Erika Fermina** We picked our poses, our outfits, our weapons—we got to pick everything! They even sent over drafts to see if we wanted to change anything. It was so cool!



**Allie Gonino** The digital first draft I saw was pretty spot on!

**What specific character details did you want to see brought to life?**

**Allie Gonino** I wanted Lilith to have both her crossbow and an instrument since those are her usual weapons of choice. Of course, the blue hair and horns were essential to include as well.

**Alice Greczyn** I was especially excited to see my character's favorite cantrip: *thorn whip*. It looks even better than I imagined!

**Erika Fermina** Lala is rarely on the ground because her walking speed is 15ft so she can't travel well that way. I wanted her to be in flight and kicking ass like she always is.

**Sujata Day** Ichabod's beard is very important to me so it needed to be perfect. The mini Ichabeard is way more authentic than my hair beard. Great job!

**Rachel Seeley** I wanted Moira to be stern and intimidating but also to have a gentle expression because even though she's tough and vain and can be a little mean she truly has a heart of gold. She just passionately—and a little aggressively—wants to help people.

**Kim Hidalgo** Fauna is tiny, so it's fun to see her to scale next to all the other characters. Kelen's Dranishka is always carrying her, so it's awesome to see them next to each other. It's also really cool that they made a miniature version of my costume.

**Kelen Coleman** I wanted Dranishka to have her fire breath, a buxom physique, pretty eyelashes, be the right brass color, and be tall. When we were told they wanted to keep my character more true to D&D minis and look like an actual dragonborn then I was asked if I wanted *my* face anywhere. I was thrilled. They ended up representing me by putting my head hanging on Dranishka's belt!

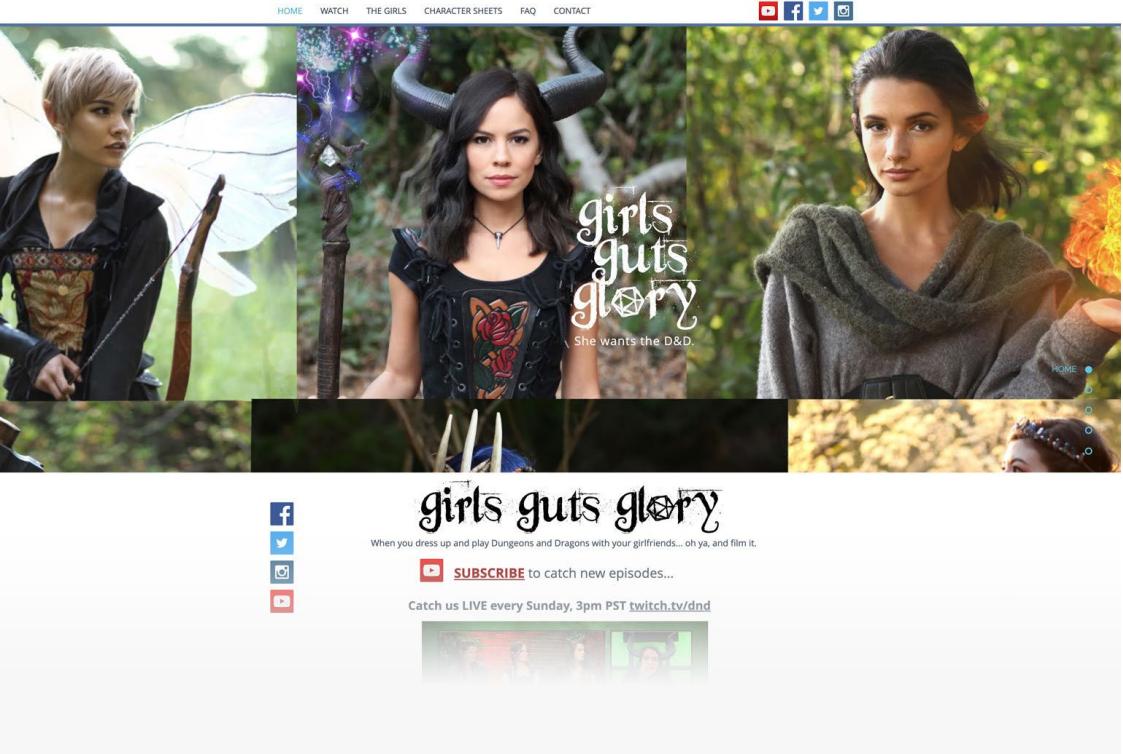
**Is this the first time you've been immortalized in plastic?**

**Alice Greczyn** Yes, this is the first time I've ever had a mini made of me! And it is a trip, for sure. I'm tickled pink!

**Kim Hidalgo** I think it's pretty cool that I got immortalized in plastic before my fiancé [actor Brant Daugherty] did.


**Kelen Coleman** I'm happy to say it *is* my first time being immortalized in plastic but also sad it's only my first!

**Rachel Seeley** It was pretty exciting opening up that box at the Stream of Many Eyes and seeing all our little faces. It feels like I'm playing a character who has an action figure.



Visit [girlsgutsgloryrpg.com](http://girlsgutsgloryrpg.com)

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# IDLE CHAMPIONS

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# Streaming Highlights

This issue we shine our spotlight on livestream games based in Waterdeep, wrestle with some newcomers and marvel at a charitably challenged Robin Hood.



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## ROLL20 PRESENTS

“We’ve been playing D&D together for almost two years now,” says DM Adam Koebel, “and what I always love is folks coming into the chat and noticing the chemistry we’ve developed. There’s something really special about a group of players who are all comfortable sharing their adventures. Even when things get heated and intense, we’re all in it together!”

“It’s a delight working with folks who are so comfortable being on camera and using the Roll20 system—it warms my blackened Dungeon Master heart to know that visitors to the show can find something cool every time they tune in. Whether tips for running

your own game or just a laugh with friends, the *Roll20 Presents* crew has something for everybody.”

The group’s latest adventures have taken Ishi, Littlefox, Malik and Arcturus to the famed Tomb of Annihilation where they’ve uncovered the source of the Death Curse and delved deep into the darkest jungles of Chult. As that adventure comes to a close soon the cast is looking forward to a new adventure in cooler climates.

“We hear Waterdeep is lovely this time of year,” Koebel says. “Once the machinations of Acererak are thwarted, a little rest and relaxation in the City of Splendors could be just what the party needs.”

*Roll20 Presents* streams on [the official D&D Twitch channel](#) from 1-5pm Pacific Standard Time on Fridays.

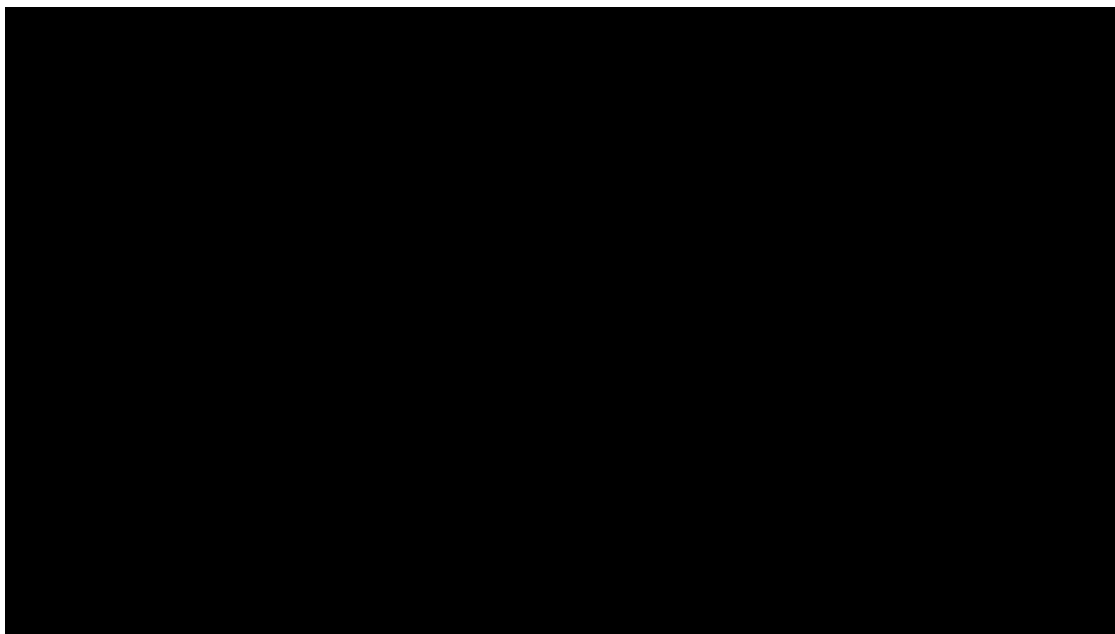
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## HIGHROLLERS PRESENTS

UK D&D group the HighRollers will be switching to a new micro-campaign titled *A Rogue’s Gambit* in September.

When the Harpers learn of plans to recover a fortune hidden in a secret vault somewhere in Waterdeep, they send in a team of roguish agents to track down those responsible and secure the gold before the villains can get their hands on it. Armed only with gadgets and guile, they are outnumbered and outgunned so these scoundrels will need to keep their cool if they want to survive... the rogue’s gambit.

“Like our previous series— *Uncharted Territory* and *Dead Reckoning*— *A Rogue’s Gambit* is a set of 12 sessions that piles a ton of action, hilarity and drama into a short series with brand new characters so anyone can jump in and watch,” says DM Mark Hulmes.



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## ROLLOUT ON THE UPUPDOWNDOWN CHANNEL

“I have known the producer of the show for twenty-plus years,” says DM Arthur Wright when we ask how he got involved with *UpUpDownDown D&D*. “He asked his friends who he should get to DM a show like this and eventually I just told him, ‘Me’. I have been playing for thirty-five years so I know what I am doing and I am also not afraid to throw myself into the game, so being on camera is not a big deal.”

That confidence is essential when your game contains a number of larger-than-life personalities—and they don’t come much bigger than four WWE Superstars wrestlers! Their style of gameplay led to plenty of unexpected highlights for Wright during the sessions. Especially as the DM had made all the characters himself and printed their minis using **Hero Forge**, only presenting them to the players fifteen minutes before they started playing.



“That’s why you see Austin shout out, ‘I’m a cat!?’ which I think was a great part of the show,” he recalls. “But I was most surprised by Brennan Williams as his character Sirias really made me feel like I was playing with Worf from *Star Trek*!

“I also gave everyone white boards and dry erase markers to keep track of hit points and such so that no trees would be harmed during the making of this video. Then all of a sudden they started using them to communicate with each other, with the audience and even more importantly to bust on each other, which I was not expecting. One of my favorite parts of the show is Sirias saying, ‘This is how you are making me feel right now!’ and holding up a drawing of a dragonborn crying.”

“Deep down this D&D game was Ember Moon’s baby and she was really great,” Wright explains, although he says we can definitely expect to see more from *UpUpDownDown D&D* and his influence will only increase as the game progresses. Having modified the starter module *Lost Mine of Phandelver* for the first outing, Wright has big plans for the next stage: he’s looking to create an extended campaign from scratch that contains all his own monsters and possibly brand new magic items as well (although he admits this might be overly ambitious).

“Things will be very new, and I hope that all the homebrewed content that I am going to create will intrigue the players as well as the viewers as they have no idea what any of the monsters will be able to do!

“In addition, we are going to hopefully have a fifth seat that is open for a guest to join us for an adventure and have other WWE Superstars or celebrities fill that spot.”

*UpUpDownDown D&D* airs on the *UpUpDownDown* YouTube channel on Sundays.

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## STREAM OF MANY EYES: BLACK VIPER

Model, cosplayer, artist, and geek extraordinaire Vivid Vivka was given an important task for the Stream of Many Eyes: bring the Black Viper to life. While she was handed some background notes, she was also allowed to put her own stamp on the character.

She describes the Black Viper as a woman of high nobility who is bored to tears and puts on the guise of the legendary thief to shake up the aristocracy and give them something to talk about over their tea.

“I personally think of her as a Robin Hood type, only without the whole ‘giving it back to the poor’ ending. I think of her as being Chaotic Neutral—she’s not thieving and messing with the upper classes out of spite or ill intention, it’s really just boredom and the need for a thrill,” says Vivka.

The creative freedom she experienced crafting the character also extended to the cosplay and she was able to venture outside the initial reference drawing.

“I wanted to keep her very true to her intended look but I had to figure the logistics of bringing a 2D drawing into the 3D world,” she explains. “How would her gauntlets actually stay up? Where do her weapons go? What materials would a woman who is well-off use?”

With help from Vivka’s friends Mel (of [The Corset Carriage](#), “my go-to seamstress”) and [Evan Ohl](#) (“a talented leatherworker and all around crafty person”) they brought the costume into the real world, while still packing a visual punch. *Dragon+* was particularly impressed by those weapons: a rapier and some push daggers.

“I’m so happy you noticed! Originally she was drawn with a sai and a rapier but when I reimagined the character I wanted to change the weaponry. I thought that a pair of push daggers would be more her style as a rogue type. They were fitting, as every Viper needs her pair of fangs!

“I did keep her gorgeous rapier blade, though. I actually purchased a show sword and repainted both the handle and the sheath. I then leather-wrapped the handle for a more rustic appearance, and wrapped the sheath with a textured leather and added some strap details.

“I see her as the type to have even more weapons on her person, in case the situation arises—I wouldn’t be surprised to see her pull out some throwing daggers, vials of potions and poisons, and of course a lock-pick kit. I still need to add these elements to her costume. The downside of ‘real life’ versus drawing is that all the weaponry gets quite bulky!”

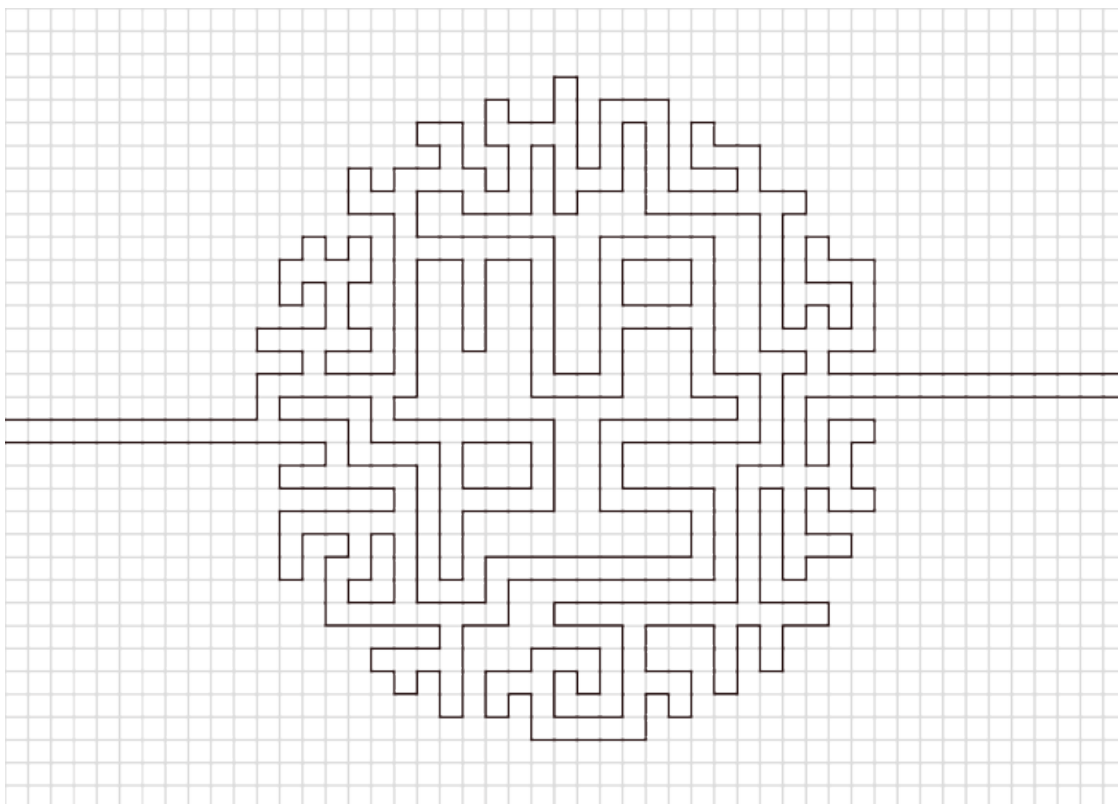
Having brought the Black Viper so stylishly to life, can we expect to see more of this charitably challenged Robin Hood? “I feel Viper still has a lot of story to tell, and I hope I get the chance to help tell it.”

You can connect with Vivid Vivka on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Twitch](#) and help support her projects on [Patreon](#). Archived games from *The Stream of Many Eyes* are [available to replay now](#).

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## Maps of the Month

This issue, a miscellany of maps for use in your game!

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As part of our look at helping beginners to play D&D this issue, we wanted to include a number of maps that have been used to teach the game through the years. Whenever possible, we also look to provide you with both tagged and untagged versions of these maps!

### Dungeon Master's Guide

Midway through the first edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the following map appeared in the section offering a sample dungeon and advice on running an initial adventure:

Your participants are now eagerly awaiting instructions from you as to how to find the place they are to seek their fortunes in. You inform them that there is a rumor in the village that something strange and terrible lurks in the abandoned monastery not far from the place. In

fact, one of the braver villagers will serve as guide if they wish to explore the ruins!

The party readily agrees, and so the adventure begins.

This section included a detailed conversation between a DM and players, offering some key insight into how a game played out around the table (in the days before Twitch/livestreaming); however, only the first three areas were detailed, such as:

2. **WATER ROOM:** This natural cavern was roughly worked to enlarge it. Torches cannot be lit. When the monastery was functioning, the place was filled with casks and barrels and buckets, but now only eight rotting barrels remain (location A.) and there are three buckets scattered about. Several of the barrels hold water—they were new and being soaked to make them tight.
3. **THE LIMED-OVER SKELETON OF THE ABBOT** is in this pool of water, but it appears to be merely a somewhat unusual mineral formation. Clutched in the bony fingers is the special key which will allow the secret door at location 28. to open to the treasury room (29.) rather than to the steps which lead down to the caverns (steps down at 30.).

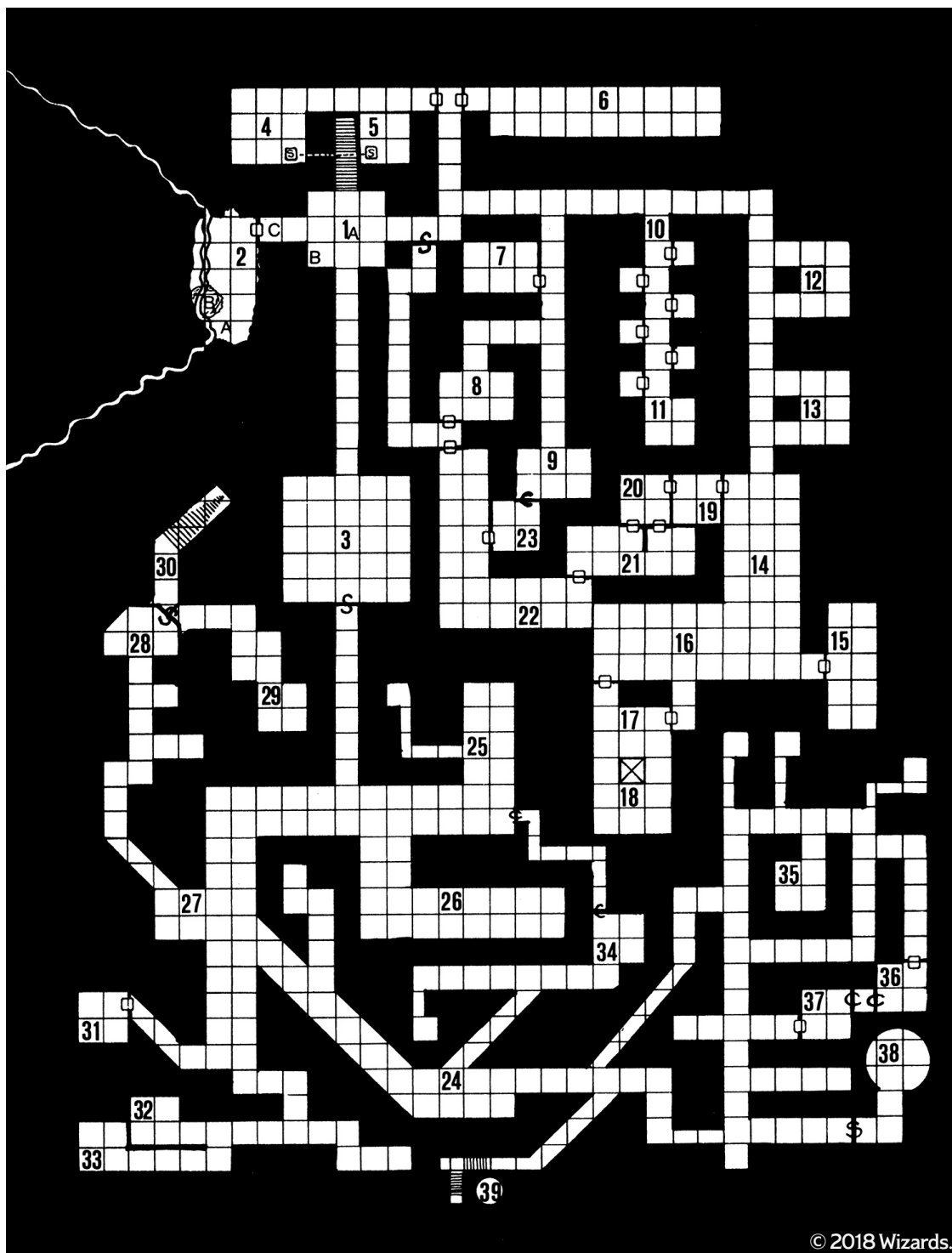
If the remains are disturbed in any way, a cylindrical object will be noticed, the thing being dislodged from where it lay by the skeleton, and the current of the stream carrying it south (downstream) at 6” speed. To retrieve it a character must be in the stream and score “to hit” as if it were AC 4 in order to catch it.

It is a watertight ivory tube with a vellum map of the whole level inside. However, slow seepage has made all but a small portion blur and run into ruin. The map shows only areas 1., 2., the passage to 3., a smudge where 3. is and the passage to 24. about 20’ south of the secret door leading from 3. to 24.—the latter being shown with miniature sarcophagi drawn in the 80’ or so not water soaked and ruined.

---

### Monastery Cellars & Secret Crypts





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## “Red Box” Basic Rules

In 1983 came this revised version of the “Basic Rules” for the game. The *Player’s Manual* in this set offered a choose-your-own-adventure

walkthrough of the game's mechanics, while the *Dungeon Master's Rulebook* ("Read This Book Next!") included a section on running your first game—complete with sample adventure exploring the ruins of an abandoned castle.

Maps laid out the first two levels (with the third appearing later in *Dungeon #150*), with notes to run the first level fully detailed:

### **1 Read the following:**

"The path through the rubble passes the fallen door. As you carefully approach, you notice some slight movement beneath it. You stop, wary of danger."

**DM: Encourage the players to send someone forward to examine the door. They should do so, to be sure their path will be safe. If they don't investigate now, a hidden monster could surprise the party as they pass by. The following encounter is a "warm-up" for both you and the players to practice playing in a group.**

Find out which characters are examining the door closely, and which are keeping watch for other dangers. Then read the following:

"Suddenly, the ground along one edge moves, and a hole appears. There's something under the door!"

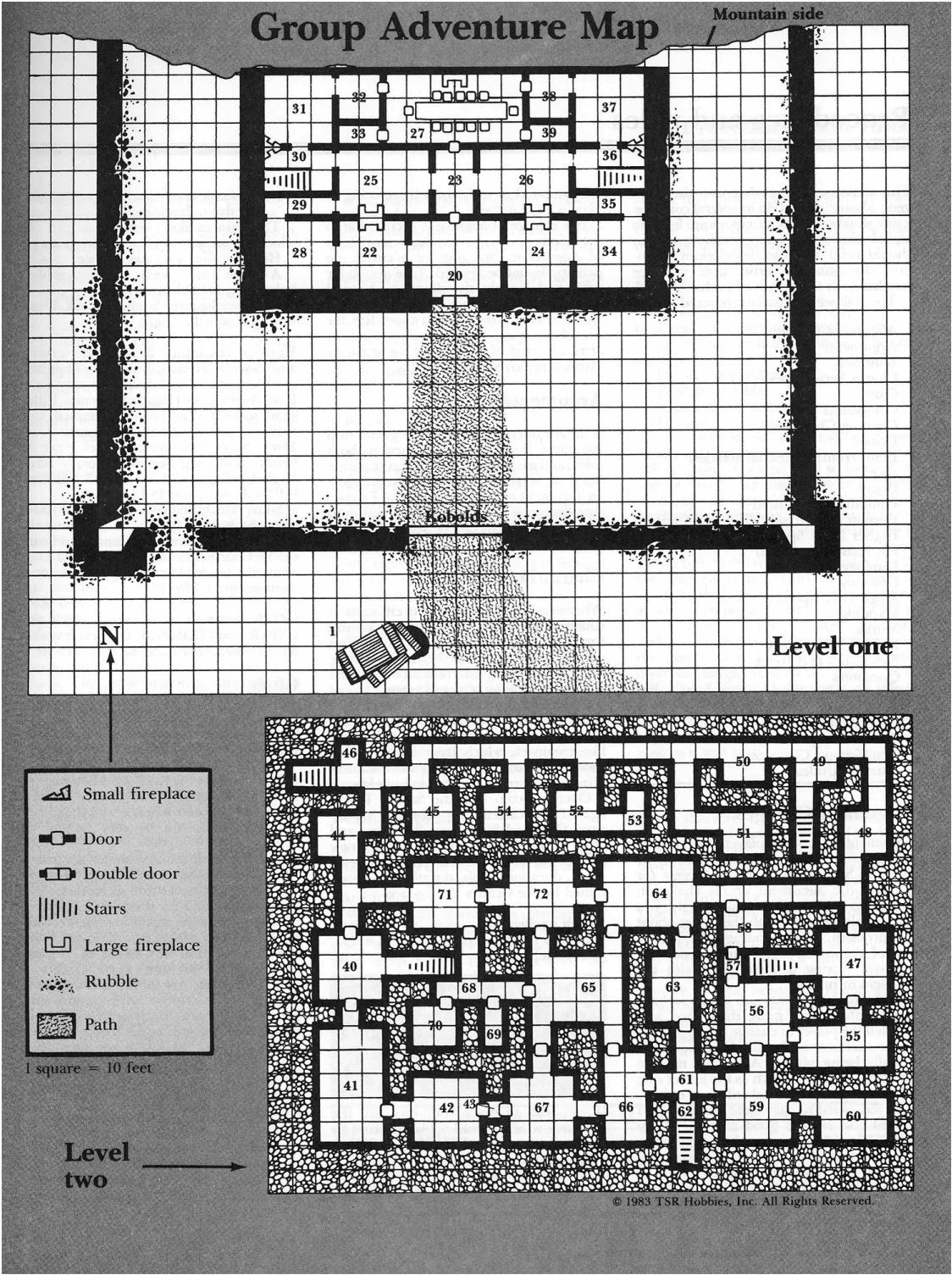
**DM: If the characters closely examining the door, select a fighter or dwarf (if possible), or randomly pick a character, to be the victim of the coming attack. Do not tell the players what you have done!**

Ask the players, one by one and starting with the victim you have chosen, what their characters intend to do. Remember what they say, and make notes if you wish. Then read the following:

"You see a large worm-like monster stick its head out of a hole under the door. It has eight long tentacles in a circle around its mouth. It doesn't come all the way out—just far enough to attack you—" (name the victim).

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## Ruins of Gygar's Castle



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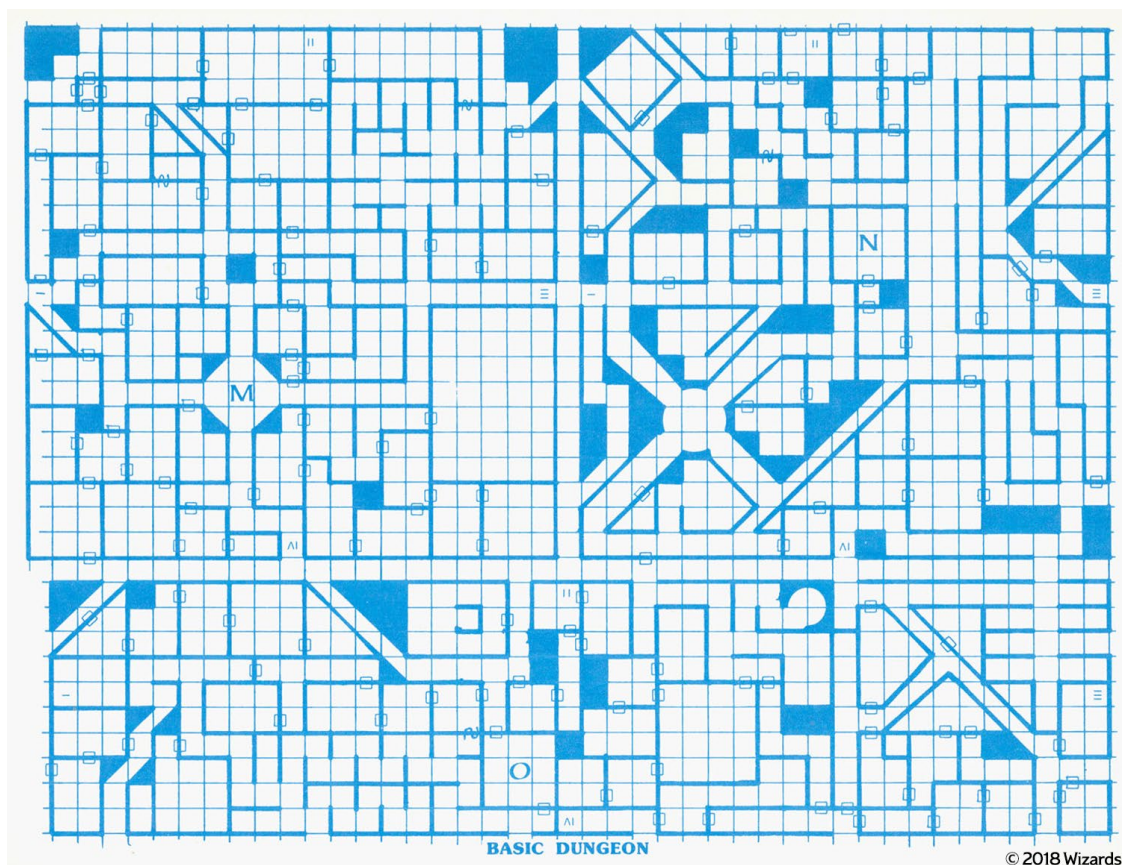
# Dungeon Geomorphs

No, not xenomorph (although we would love to play through that bug



hunt). Geomorphs were originally released in 1977 as Set 1: Basic Dungeon, Set 2: Caves & Caverns, and Set 3: Lower Dungeons. Blank maps, the pages could be cut and assembled to create elaborate sprawling dungeons—a sample of which you can download below:

### Geomorph 1: Basic Dungeon

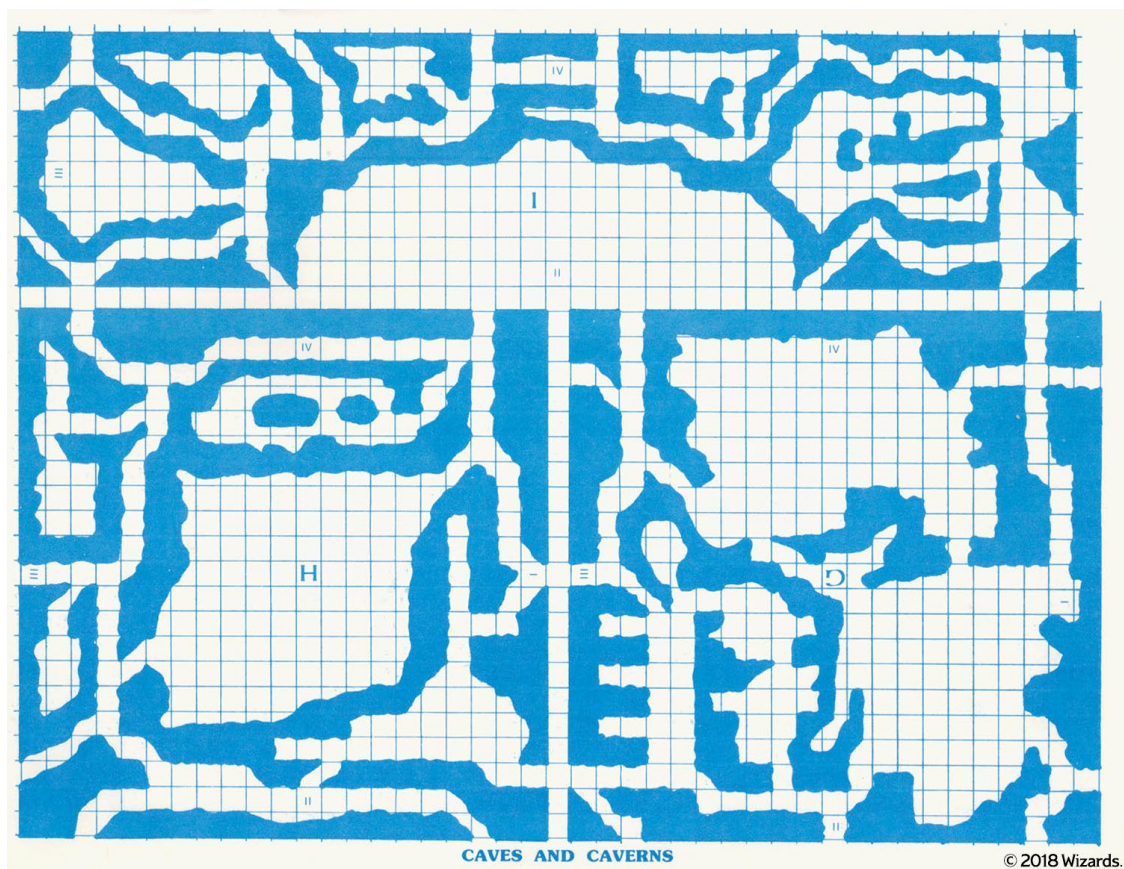


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### Geomorph 2: Caves & Caverns



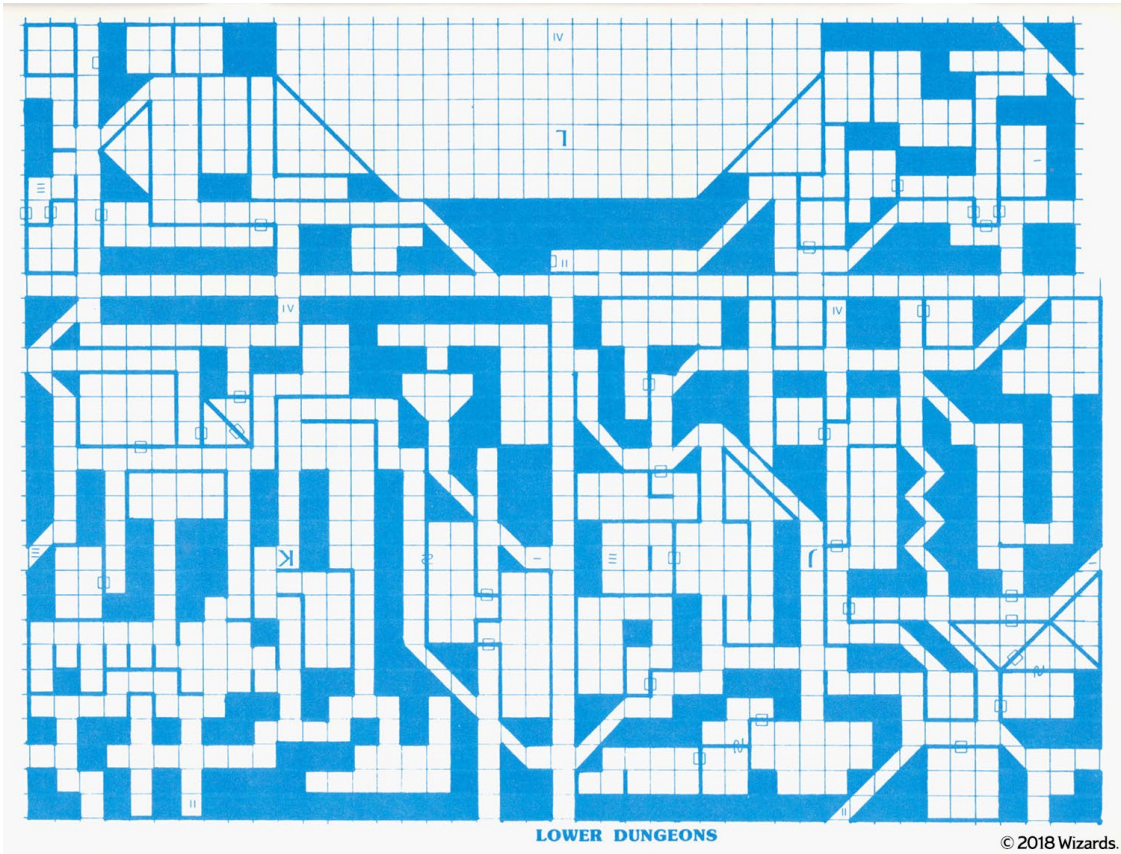
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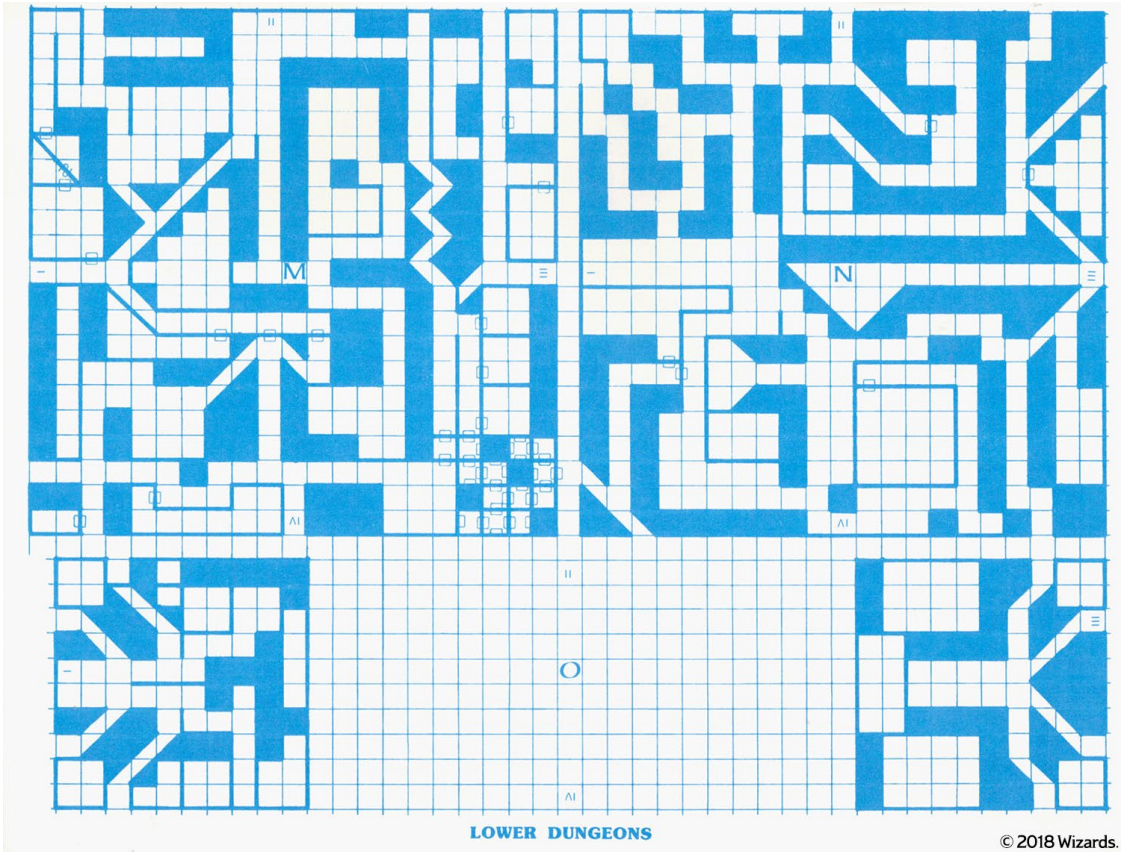
## Geomorph 3: Lower Dungeons





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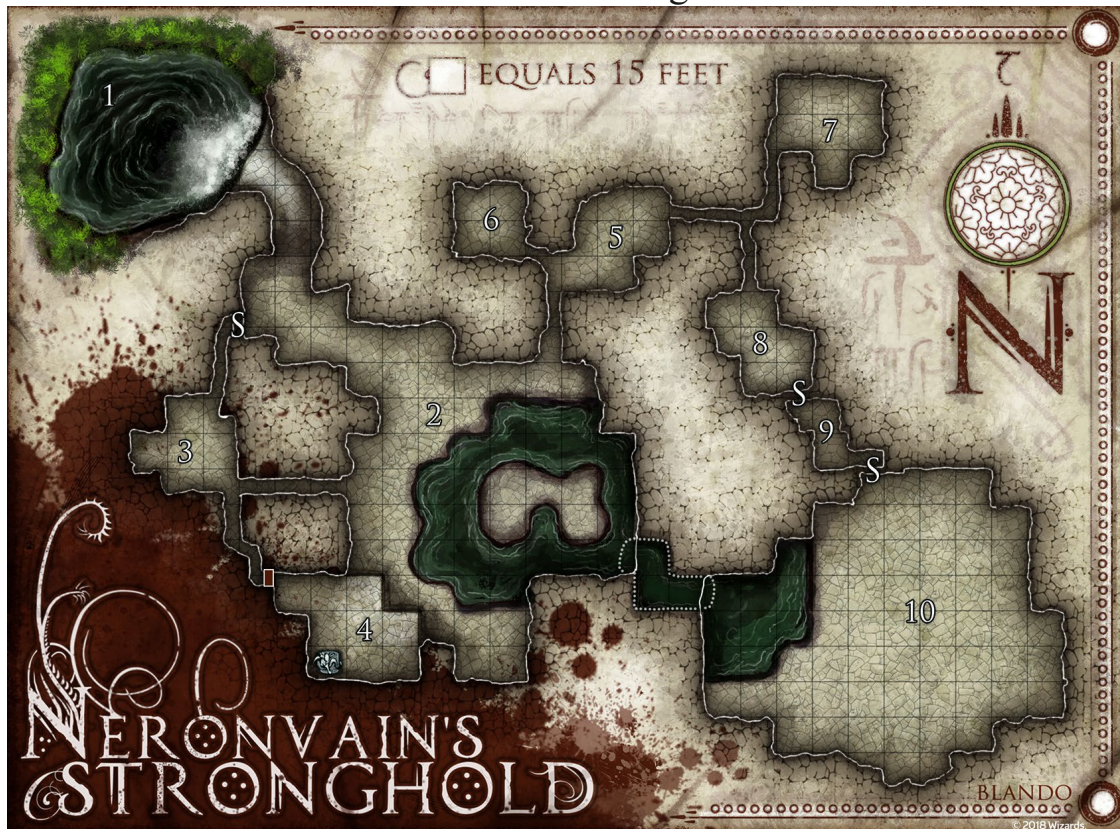


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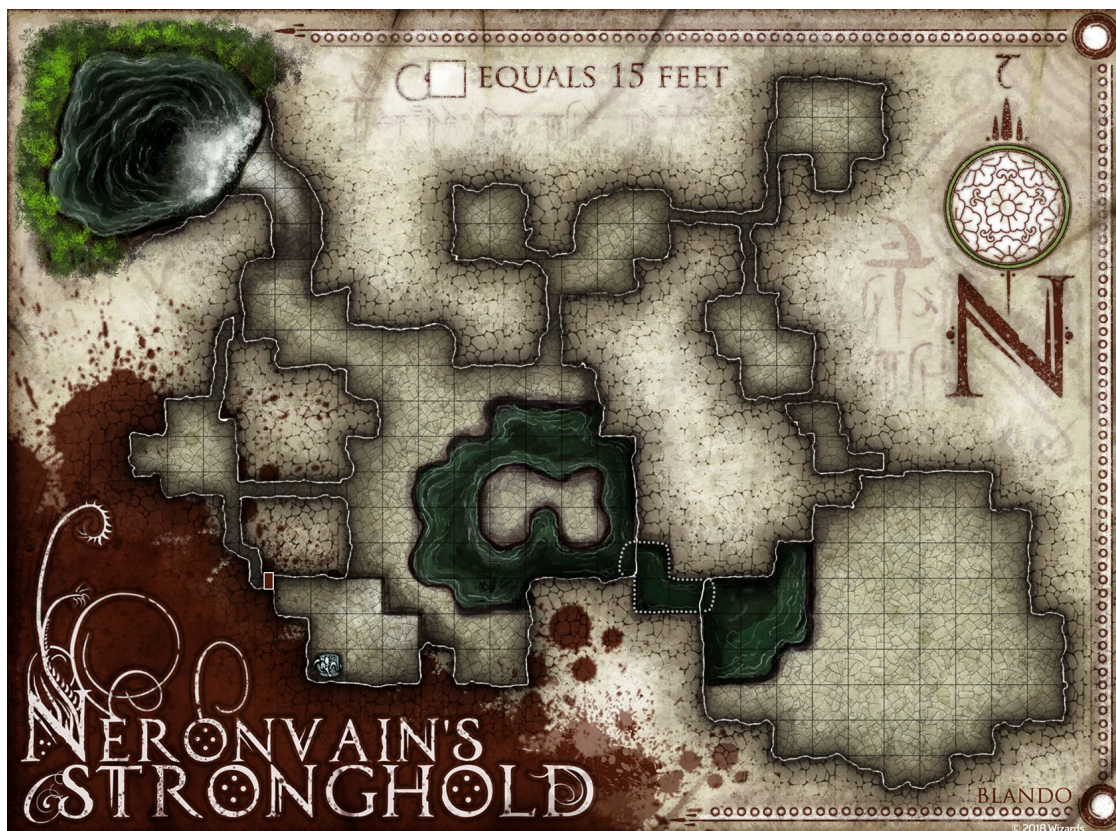
And finally, we wanted to include a few more recent maps, for use as a sample stronghold and dungeon complex:

### Neronvain's Stronghold



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### Digital Maps

Please note that *Rise of Tiamat* can be found at [Fantasy Grounds](#) and the [Roll20](#) virtual tabletop. Look for all the adventures available now!

### Cartographers

And as always, our appreciation goes out to our amazing cartographers; this issue, these include [Jared Blando](#).

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# The Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild

DMs Guild Adept Shawn Merwin looks at creators writing for children, as well as urban adventuring content to expand the world of Waterdeep.

Shawn Merwin



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**T**he **Dungeon Masters Guild** is the perfect platform for creating, sharing, and publishing your adventures. Since its launch, hundreds of DMs, players, and fans have created new characters, monsters, spells, and locations, bringing a wealth of options and detail to the Forgotten Realms.

The array of products currently available on the Guild is astonishing,



and more is added daily. But with so many choices, how do you know which ones to pick? Well, *Dragon+* is here to help. Each issue, we shine a spotlight on some of the best content on the DMs Guild, and speak to its creators to learn how it was made.

In keeping with our focus on younger players this issue, we chat with Jen Adcock, whose first contribution to the DMs Guild was *Grammy's Country Apple Pie*, a short (and sweet) adventure designed with them in mind. What happens when an elderly wizard has a hankering for a delicious treat from his young charges? Adventure, that's what!

The announcement of *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* and *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage* also got us thinking about urban adventures and grand dungeons. We highlight some of the best from the DMs Guild.

## Creator Q&A

Jennifer Adcock discusses her adventure for children, *Grammy's Country Apple Pie*, and shares the lessons she's learned since writing it.

### **What's your experience with D&D and why did you write an adventure focused on young players?**

I was quite young when I got into the hobby. My older brother got me into D&D when I was about 12, so that's where all this started. I decided to write adventures for young players when a couple of kids, aged between eight and thirteen, joined our local Adventurer's League program at my **FLGS**. I was running *Out of the Abyss* and *Curse of Strahd* at the time, which opened my eyes to how some content might not always be ideally suited for kids for one reason or another—such as content, complexity, etc. When I looked for D&D adventures for kids, I found there was a niche to be filled.

### **Your adventure *Grammy's Country Apple Pie* has a two-page insert with tips for running the adventure for children. What are your top tips for creators writing content for kids, or DMs running games for them?**

For writing games aimed at kids, it's important to play up the fantasy angle. The more magic you can include, the better. *Grammy's Country Apple Pie* is a modified, fleshed-out version of the very first

adventure my brother ran for me—used with his permission, of course. I added and emphasized things that would be fantastical to a child, such as treants and dryads, magically animated objects, wizards in pointy hats, and so on.

But it was also important to keep the goal grounded in something that would be familiar to a child. Apple pie is recognizable, and kids aren't going to lose track of why they're pursuing it in the first place. Clear goals are key with kids; a muddled objective leads to confusion.

As for running games for kids, we always talk about how unpredictable players can be—you can't plan for everything your players might come up with, so don't try. That goes triple for kids. Kids take whatever you give them and twist it into something that is both unrecognizable and way cooler than whatever you were going for.

What's great is that kids aren't necessarily coming into D&D with the preconceived notions many adult players have. They have less of an idea of what 'epic fantasy' should be, so they're much more open to off-the-wall ideas. Kids don't know about Drizzt Do'Urden and the 30 years of lore that accompany him. They don't know *Lord of the Rings* or *Game of Thrones*, and that can be a blessing.

Even more than DMing for adults, DMing for kids is about reacting to what they give you. When you give a prompt, you don't know where it's going—you can't be ready for everything, so you just have to go with the flow. I've had kids at my tables invent the bicycle, so they can start their own biker gang. They've cast illusions to convince monsters they were being grounded by their parents. They've asked the treant from this particular adventure to adopt them. If you don't quash their fun by saying no, they'll show you just how creative they can be.

### **Grammy's Country Apple Pie included six pre-generated characters with custom character sheets. Why did you create those?**

When I spoke to the younger gamers and their parents, a recurring theme was that character creation is intimidating for new D&D players, particularly young ones. It's a lot to keep track of! I thought

by including the pre-generated characters I could ease some of that burden, especially for a young DM.

I think people often forget that kids are getting into running games too, and anything that can simplify a game for a 10-year-old DM who wants to run a super cool adventure for her friends is a good thing. It's also a boon for conventions, which is where I see a lot of kids with their families taking their first steps into this game. You can't ask brand new players to make characters during a four-hour convention slot—let them jump into the game headfirst!

# Grammy's Country Apple Pie

## *A Quest for the Best*

**Introduction:** When the ancient wizard Tyndareus develops a craving for a special treat from his childhood, he will stop at nothing to get his hands on the best apple pie in the whole world. He hires a group of adventurers to seek out the bakery that once produced the wonderful dessert - unfortunately for them, the bakery has long since been overrun by goblins. But all is not as it seems at Grammy's Bakery, and Tyndareus isn't the only one who'd do anything for those pies.

A two-hour adventure for 1st-4th level  
characters

by Jennifer Adcock



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**Grammy's Country Apple Pie was written early in your DMs Guild career. Since then you have written for D&D Adventurers League and created other projects, in D&D and other games. What lessons have you learned along the way?**

I like to think I've learned a lot since I wrote *Grammy's Country Apple Pie*, and a lot of that comes from the kids who've played this and other adventures I've written. Two of my friends hosted a D&D birthday party for their son. Watching a room of 20 nine-year-olds play D&D for the first time was an education. One of the things I think is hardest and most valuable is figuring out where to lean into your players' assumptions and where to subvert them—and that goes for adults too.

People have an innate instinct for fairy tales, which really is the root of every fantasy game. If you tell them they need to go defeat the evil witch in the woods, they can take that premise at face value; you don't need to waste time explaining what they're doing or why it matters. But if you let them discover at the heart of the adventure that the witch isn't really evil after all, then you can surprise them, and surprise is often what makes games memorable.

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## Design Thought: Young Gamers and Combat

People differ in their opinions of how much violence is reasonable for children. One tactic for eliminating that concern is creating foes in kids' games that are safe to defeat.

Summoned monsters from other dimensions can disappear in a puff of smoke when vanquished. Whereas animated weapons and suits of armor are great foes, because they are literally made for combat. Robots, golems, and other creatures created from parts are ideal monsters to 'deactivate' through combat.


## Troll Trouble

Adventure designer Gary Whicker serves up new twists on old tropes with his kid-friendly adventure for low-level characters. When a drought threatens a small farming village, they order supplies from a neighboring town. After those supplies fail to arrive, the people sent to track them down don't return.


**N1**

**Adventure Module N1**  
**Troll Trouble**  
by Gary Whicker

FOR CHARACTER LEVELS 1-2



Vital supplies have failed to arrive at the suffering frontier settlement of Ravendale. Rumors are flying that the supply wagon has fallen afoul of the legendary troll of Stonebottom bridge. Unless the heroes reclaim the supplies the town won't survive the coming winter!



Publisher's Choice Quality Stock Art © Rick Hershey / Fat Goblin Games

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The adventurers enter the story to investigate rumors of a troll lairing near a bridge along the road. What follows is a case of mistaken identity, an ogre named Burt, creatures combined by magic (like the dreaded “bunny-wolves”), goblins in over their misshapen little heads, and the potential to find and eliminate the source of the drought.

With slight alterations, this adventure can be run as a fun romp for kids, or as a more serious adventure for more mature players.

## Design Thought: Urban Adventuring

*Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* will introduce a new generation of gamers—as well as some who have been playing for ages—to fifth edition urban adventuring. Parties face new challenges in a large and heavily populated city, which can be equally challenging for DMs.

Games that unfold in a dungeon, or in a wide-open space, allow players to unload their full arsenal of abilities and tactics without the need to worry about consequences. Throw a *fireball* in an Underdark temple? No problem! Bring lightning down on a dragon atop a mountain? Wonderful!

Adventuring in the close confines of a densely populated city calls for a little bit of finesse on the part of players who may not be used to the concept. The villains often blend in with the population of the city. Characters with a more larcenous bent must be ever-wary of the watchful eyes of the city guard. Throwing around area spells on crowded streets will almost certainly lead to unintended casualties.

When creating urban adventures, try to make the setting an important part of the unfolding story. Intrigue and subtlety should play a larger role in the challenges facing the characters. You can also put a dungeon beneath the city (like the dreaded Undermountain of Waterdeep) when the players need to let off some steam.

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## Other Products

**The Ghostly Infestation**

**by Dan Dillon Price: \$4.99**



An excellent example of designing an adventure within an urban environment comes from veteran game designer Dan Dillon. In this scenario, created for characters from levels 1-4, ghostly spirits are set loose within the city of Melvaunt to possess its citizens. Soon, the city watch is flooded with reports of strange behavior and public unrest. The adventurers are called upon to investigate disturbances and determine if they are the result of spirit possession or normal activity.



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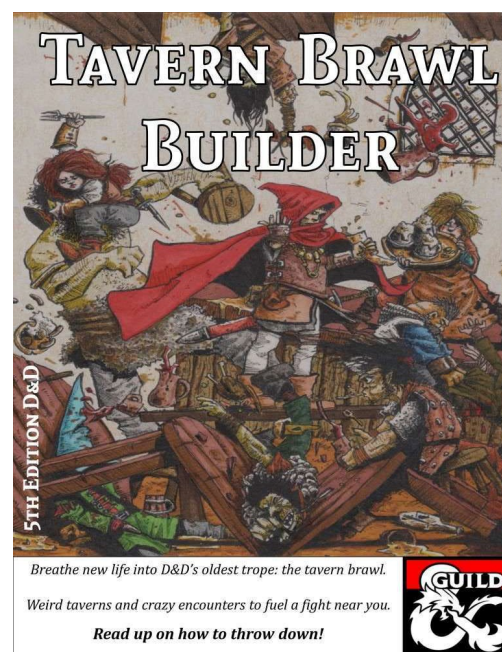
Dillon is a contributor to *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*, and his work can be seen in many products from Kobold Press. This adventure is also part of the Convention-Created Content program, which encourages game conventions to make official Adventurers League products for play. These adventures fit nicely into a four-hour time slot, and they see play by thousands of people around the world —both in the Adventurers League and in homebrew games.

[LEARN MORE](#)

### Tavern Brawl Builder by Jean Lorber Price: \$3.95

Urban centers have lots of taverns, and one of the staples of fantasy entertainment in general is the tavern brawl. In *Tavern Brawl Builder*, prolific DMs Guild contributor Jean Lorber takes this trope to a new level, looking at the tavern brawl from a number of different angles.

Brawls can be difficult to manage



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within the typical encounter-building structures of the game. Encounters present most smoothly when the good guys are on one side, the bad guys on the other, and the victory conditions are clear. Mass combats, with participants liable to change sides or throw punches at the nearest combatant, can model poorly or end badly when all the NPCs fight only the PCs. But they are so much fun!

*Tavern Brawl Builder* offers the mechanic of treating a brawl like a monster, with hit points and attacks of their own. It also provides 10 taverns ready to be placed into a fantasy city, several different flavors of brawl encounters for your adventure, and complications that might occur during your typical, work-a-day tavern brawl.

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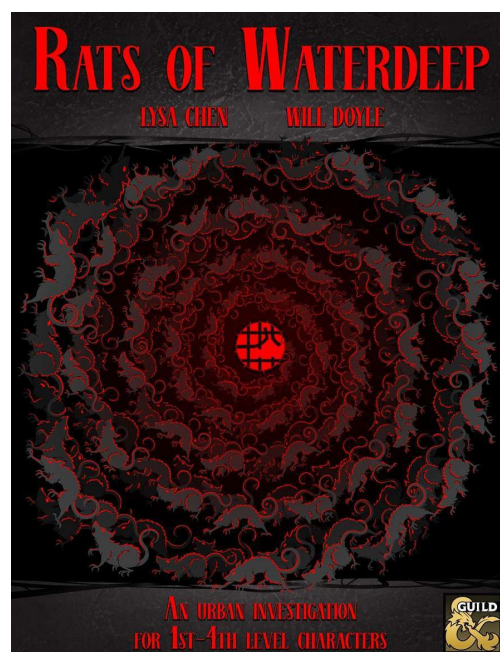
## Rats of Waterdeep

by Lysa Chen and Will Doyle Price: \$4.95

Guild Adept Lysa Chen and Will Doyle join forces to create this marvelous adventure, set in the city of Waterdeep, for 1st-level characters. All of the best parts of urban noir adventures are highlighted: devious organizations, strange and

wonderful NPCs, investigation into grand plots between competing factions, and more.

The maps, illustrations, and handouts in this adventure are beautifully rendered, and they add greatly to its overall feel. The section on “Adventure Flow” shows a map of city streets, with comic-like bubbles showing where the adventure’s events happen and in what order. Boxed text is displayed in torn pieces of notepaper. Even though the adventure can be played in four hours, the setting and details are so rich it is almost a mini-setting that could support other adventures.



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Game designer and editor Shawn Merwin’s professional work on Dungeons & Dragons has ranged from third to fifth edition, showing up in sourcebooks, adventures, articles, and Organized Play administration. He wrote the Acquisitions Incorporated adventure *Quest for the Bronzebottom Bock*, has written adventures for the D&D Adventurers League, and manages convention-created content for Baldman Games.

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# Grammy's Country Apple Pie

## *A Quest for the Best*

**Introduction:** When the ancient wizard Tyndareus develops a craving for a special treat from his childhood, he will stop at nothing to get his hands on the best apple pie in the whole world. He hires a group of adventurers to seek out the bakery that once produced the wonderful dessert - unfortunately for them, the bakery has long since been overrun by goblins. But all is not as it seems at Grammy's Bakery, and Tyndareus isn't the only one who'd do anything for those pies.

A two-hour adventure for 1st-4th level  
characters

by Jennifer Adcock



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### STOP! An Important Note Before You Start:

All combat situations in this encounter are avoidable, whether by stealth, negotiation, deception, bribery, cleverness, or good old-fashioned running away. If a combat is initiated that the players no longer wish to participate in, any combat situation can be de-escalated with a DC 13 Charisma or Wisdom check, along with a plan or alternative solution from a player character. With the exception of running away, "defeating" a foe in any of these manners will still count for XP gained. Pacifistic approaches are completely valid here, and it may be a good idea to remind your players of this at the beginning of the session. You may also choose, by your own discretion, to have combatant monsters and NPCs attempt to de-escalate the situation.

## Introduction

The players have been summoned, whether individually or as an assembled party, to a wizard's tower with the promise of a paying job. The wizard's imp servant has led them into the tower and shown them up to the wizard's study. Read the following aloud:

"Although you were initially distrustful when the imp appeared at the door to let you into the old wizard's tower, inside you have seen enough benign wonders to assuage your concerns. At the top of a long and winding staircase is the wizard's study. Within, you see a room lined with bookshelves, and a desk covered with bubbling potions, mysterious trinkets, and ink-stained scraps of parchment. An elderly man with long, wispy, white hair, milky eyes, and a large hooked nose sits in a cozy chair behind the desk. He very slowly stands up and introduces himself as Tyndareus the Green. He pours you each a cup of tea and finally tells you why he summoned you here.

'When I was a boy,' he says, smacking his lips, 'I tasted the most wonderful treat in all the Material Plane. I remember it like it was yesterday. Grammy's Country Apple Pies... The bakery was near my hometown and you could smell the spices all day and night, no matter where you were in town. Alas, when I went away to wizard college, the place was overrun by goblins and no one has dared go back in since. I'd like to taste those heavenly pies just once more before I depart for the Celestial Plane. If I give you a map to the bakery, can you go in and find Grammy's secret recipe for me?'"

If the players inquire as to what their reward will be, the wizard informs them that although he has little gold, there will be gold for them at the end, and he tells them that they can keep anything of value they might find in the bakery. All he wants is the recipe.

## To The Bakery

The map reveals that it is about two days ride to the bakery. There is a small town nearby where the players can stock up on any general goods they feel they might need (no magic items are to be found in the marketplace there, but anything from the Player's Handbook equipment and gear tables are fair game). The trip can pass uneventfully, or the DM may choose to roll a d6 on the following table for a random encounter.

### Random Encounter Table

D6	Encounter
1	Rust monster
2	Giant spider
3	Black bear
4	Bugbear
5	Blink dog
6	Vine blight

## 1- Entrance

---

"As you approach the large stone building, the road turns into a gravel path surrounded by an overgrown lawn, leading toward a large set of wooden double doors. The fragrance of ripening apples is thick in the air from the old apple orchard in the back. There is one massive apple tree near the path to the front doors. As the wind whistles through the long grasses, you notice that the bark of the tree looks almost like an ancient, wizened face."

The tree is an apple **treant** named Mac, or Macintosh. He is grumpy and old, and has very little patience for the antics of youngsters. He knows of the goblins inside the building, but does not particularly care, since they ignore him. If any of the players poses a threat to any of the other trees or plants in the area, Mac is now hostile towards them. He aims only to incapacitate and never to kill, but he will not tolerate any harm to nature in his presence. He can, at will, awaken the nine shrubs in the front of the building to go and pester the party. With DC 12 Investigate or Charisma checks, he reveals that he doesn't know about any secret recipes, but he remembers that old Grammy used to chat every day with the **dryads** who live out back in the old orchard, and suggests that they might know something.

The set of doors is loosely barred from the inside, as the goblins primarily use the back entrance. The wood is rotting and it can be broken open with a DC 14 Strength check.

## Outside

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For every ten minutes the group spends walking around outside the bakery, roll a d6 to find out if they encounter a patrol group of 1d4 **goblins**. On a 6, the goblins see them first and try to run away. On a 1, the group sees the goblins before they are spotted, and they can decide what to do from there.

## 2- Apple Orchard

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"The scent of apples is even thicker here. The older trees are arranged in neat orderly rows, but the saplings that have sprouted since the goblins took over are everywhere. There is a whispering sound that doesn't seem to come from just the leaves rustling in the wind. Early ripened apples litter the ground. As you approach, one of them flies through the air, narrowly missing your heads. The sound of whispering is joined by the sound of giggling."

The three dryads who live in the orchard are mischievous, but reclusive. They won't come out to talk without an offering of a gift, or a DC 13 Persuasion check. They don't like to give much information, but they also really don't like those disgusting goblins. It takes a DC 17 Persuasion or Investigation check for them to reveal that half the secret recipe is in the front office and half is in Grammy's apartment. If they like the party, they can also reveal that they have a better chance of surprising the goblins if they go in through the loading dock. If the party in some way offends the dryads, they pelt them with half-rotten apples until they leave, or until the dryads get bored.

## 3- Waste Pile

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"What was once an orderly row of compost and waste bins has long since been heaped up into a massive trash pile. It is overgrown with fungus and other decomposers taking advantage of the ready supply of food. It smells rancid, the odor being carried on the breeze."



If anyone comes within 5 feet of the waste pile, a **violet fungus** slowly oozes out (moving at half speed) and must be either fought or avoided.

## 4- Shop

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"The shop is a small front area of the bakery where the famous pies could be sold directly to hungry customers. A counter at the back of the room stands surrounded by shelves on every wall. It appears that while the shelves once held lovely packages of pies, they have long since been ransacked; paper boxes and bits of ribbon and twine litter the floor. Two small tables have been overturned in the center of the room. There is a door on either side of the room, as well as the large double doors that lead outside."

There are many signs of goblin infestation in the room that could be used to track the goblins living here. If the party searches the counter area, a DC 12 Perception check will find a locked cashbox. It will require a DC 14 Sleight of Hand check to pick the lock, or DC 16 Strength to simply smash it open. It contains 8 gp, 11 sp, and 21 cp.

## 5- Office

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"This well-appointed room of sturdy mahogany furniture and velvet curtains contains two paper-strewn desks with overturned chairs. The remaining walls are lined with bookshelves and filing cabinets. The goblin odor is not as strong in here as it is in other areas of the bakery."

The goblins cannot read and see no use for stupid papers except as kindling for fires, and there's plenty of that outside. The bookshelves

contain records of the bakery's finances (business was booming). A DC 13 Perception check will find the safe hidden behind one of the shelves. DC 15 Sleight of Hand check is required to pick the lock, or DC 17 Strength to pry it open. The safe contains 75 gp, 50 sp, and 25 cp.

One of the desk drawers is trapped, but the mechanism can be spotted with a DC 13 Perception check. A DC 16 Dexterity check will disarm the trap. If the drawer is opened without disarming it, a poison needle springs out of the drawer to stab whoever is opening it. It does 1 piercing damage and 1d10 poison damage. The victim will also need to make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw to avoid being poisoned for one hour. This drawer contains one half of the secret recipe on a torn up old parchment scroll.

Other drawers contain blank paper, quills, ink, etc. There is one silver signet ring worth about 10 gp. The curtains are still in decent condition and could probably fetch another 10 gp at the market, but they are heavy and cumbersome. The furniture would fetch a pretty penny indeed but is far too heavy to be moved without assistance.

## 6- Guard Room

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"Although there was little need for it, Grammy kept two or three young men from the nearby town employed as guards, more to keep them out of trouble than anything else. This room is where they kept their equipment and took breaks during long night patrols. Three quarterstaffs have fallen to the floor from where they once stood against one wall. There is a small table with two chairs, all of which have been overturned. A locked chest sits opposite the quarterstaffs."

The quarterstaffs are not in great condition, due to the wood not being preserved. If the party chooses to take and use them, roll a d6 when an attack made with one of them fails. On a 5 or 6, the staff breaks. The chest requires a DC 15 Dexterity check to pick the lock or a DC 17 Strength check to smash the lock off. Inside are three bottles of Shillelagh oil, which will work as if casting the spell Shillelagh when rubbed on a club or quarterstaff.

## 7- Loading Dock

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"A sliding wooden door opens into a room with bare stone floors and plain walls. An empty wagon stands abandoned in the room, gathering dust. You can see, within the bakery, packing and shipping pallets that stand ready to be loaded onto the wagon. As you watch, a patrol of two goblins walks by, oblivious."

If the party, on average, succeeds at a DC 13 Stealth check, the goblins continue on their patrol with no notice. If they do not, one of the goblins stops, sniffs the air, and declares that he smells something funny, and they come in to investigate.

## 8- Bakery Floor

---

"The bakery floor is a wide open space with high ceilings with exposed wooden beams, sound echoing throughout the room. Two stone rooms stand to one side with heavy barred doors keeping them closed. Between them is a small glass cabinet with an even smaller mallet hanging on a chain. Six long work benches fill the center of the room, covered with pie tins, rolling pins, and other baking equipment. Some of the rolling pins are still rolling lazily back and forth, some enchantment keeping them in motion. Dulled knives chop at apples that haven't been there in years. On the other side are six massive ovens, their doors still opening periodically, as if remembering that they are supposed to. Tall chimneys rise from each oven to pierce the ceiling overhead. The whole area is the mess, not the work of a professional baker. It looks as if someone has tried and failed to teach themselves to make pie."

The glass cabinet contains two regular healing potions. The magic baking equipment might be able to fetch a few coppers as a curio for some interested wizard, but otherwise is in poor condition. The non-magical baking equipment wouldn't even be able to get that, so much of it is eaten through with rust and rot. A Mending cantrip may be able to fix some of the physical damage, but it cannot restore or strengthen any magic.

The stone rooms, one used for ingredient storage and one for finished product storage, are mostly empty, but the runes inscribed in the stone are still keeping the rooms chilled. These runes can be copied by any magic users in the party. It is a second level spell, a variation on Cone of Cold which only lowers the temperature enough to cool food, not enough to do damage. A DC 15 Perception check will find several bags

of exotic spices hidden away in a corner - a bag each of cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and cloves. Each one is worth about 5 gp.

The goblins have been attempting to replicate Grammy's pies - which they have become addicted to. If the party attempts to interfere in any way with the magical objects, three **goblins** drop down from the rafters to stop them. They can be reasoned with and negotiated with, if the party agrees to show them the recipe. They cannot read, but they will remember things they are told verbally or that are demonstrated to them. DC 14 Charisma, Persuasion, or Intimidation, if that's more your party's style. The goblins are not smart, and are easily deceived, but they will have a long memory of this deception. Or it comes to fighting, although the goblins do not wish to instigate combat.

The ovens are still warm, but not hot, and certainly not hot enough to bake a pie (as evidenced by some half-baked messes in pie tins sitting on top of them). This is not due to magic, but by the residence of some creatures who find ovens very conveniently hospitable. They are comfortable and do not attack unless provoked. Roll a d4 on the following table:

**D4 Encounter**

<b>1</b>	1d3 (1d6 halved) magmins
<b>2</b>	1d4 smoke mephits
<b>3</b>	1d4 magma mephits
<b>4</b>	1 fire snake

## 9- Grammy's Apartment

"This once homey apartment where the famed Grammy used to reside has been turned into a true goblin hovel. Two goblins and their leader stand in the middle of the room, staring at you. Ancient mahogany furniture still stands in the room, too heavy for the goblins to move. A bed, missing a mattress stands in one corner. A wardrobe, now filled with crude weapons, is in the opposite corner. Against one wall is a desk, covered in animal pelts and hunting trophies."

These goblins (two regular **goblins** and one **chief**) can be negotiated with or fought. One of the desk drawers is trapped, but can be spotted with a DC 13 Perception check. A DC 16 Dexterity check will disarm the trap. If the drawer is opened without disarming it, a poison needle springs out of the drawer to stab whoever is opening it. It does 1 piercing damage and 1d10 poison damage. The victim will also need to make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw to avoid being poisoned for one hour. This drawer contains one half of the secret recipe on a torn up old parchment scroll. It also contains a small spellbook - more like a spell notebook - containing the few spells that old Grammy knew: Druidcraft, Entangle, Purify Food and Drink, and Speak with Plants.



# Finale

Read the following aloud if the party brings the complete recipe back to Tyndareus:

"The old man's face lights up as he reads through the recipe. 'Of course, of course! It all makes sense,' he says. He uses Mending to repair the torn parchment and gives it to his imp servant to make one immediately. He rummages in a drawer for a moment, then emerges with a rust-colored leather bag. 'I think you'll find that quite entertaining,' he says, with a twinkle in his eye. He also gives you 25 gold pieces, in a smaller, plain bag. As the imp returns impossibly fast with a wonderful smelling pie, Tyndareus offers to share with you. It is, indeed, the tastiest apple pie you've ever had the pleasure to eat."

The rust-colored bag is a **Bag of Tricks**, which is of course, fun. If they do not retrieve the whole recipe, Tyndareus informs them that this is only half the recipe, and they'll have to go back for the rest. If they tell him that it is impossible, or if they quit, he is disappointed, but resigned to his pie-less fate.

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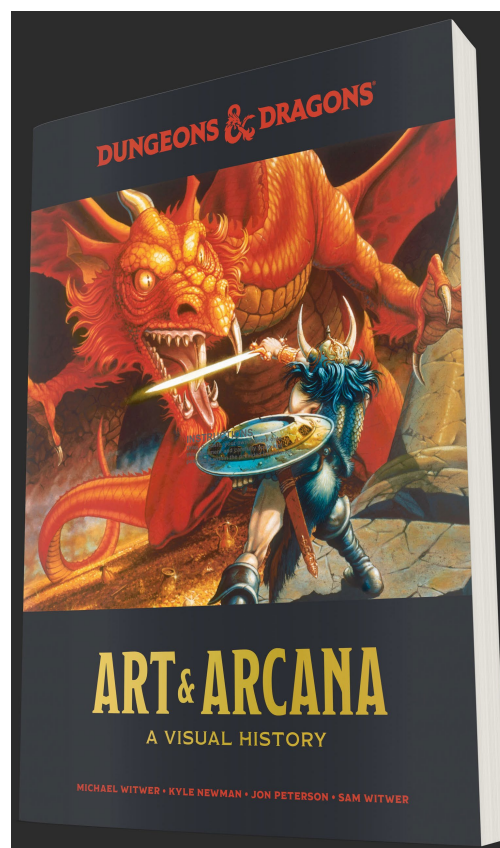


## Dragon Classic: Art & Arcana

### Art & Arcana: A Visual History

We've already looked at a number of products coming out in the months ahead, many of which would make outstanding gifts for existing players or potential gamers. There's one more we want to add — a fitting one to consider here, where we look back at past issues of *Dragon* Magazine.

*Art & Arcana: A Visual History* releases October 23, described as “an illustrated guide to the history and evolution of the beloved roleplaying game told through the paintings, sketches, illustrations, and visual ephemera behind its creation, growth, and continued popularity. Inside the book, you'll find more than seven hundred pieces of artwork — from each edition of the core role-playing books, supplements, and adventures; as well as *Forgotten Realms* and *Dragonlance* novels; decades of *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines;



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and classic advertisements and merchandise; plus never-before-seen sketches, large-format canvases, rare photographs, one-of-a-kind drafts, and more from the now-famous designers and artists associated with Dungeons & Dragons.”

Much like the D&D *Core Rules Gift Set* featuring an alt-cover version, *Art & Arcana: A Visual History* also offers a deluxe, special edition version. Contained inside a clamshell featuring original illustrations by superstar D&D artist Hydro74, this special edition includes re-creations of classic D&D artwork, as well as an unpublished original version of the game’s most infamous adventure module, *Tomb of Horrors*.

You can pre-order *Art & Arcana: A Visual History* at Amazon (including the *Special Edition* ), as well as the **Barnes & Noble exclusive edition**.

Of course, as this is a book all about the visuals of the game, we wanted to give you a detailed look inside-including spreads of past *Dragon* Magazines.

### About the Art

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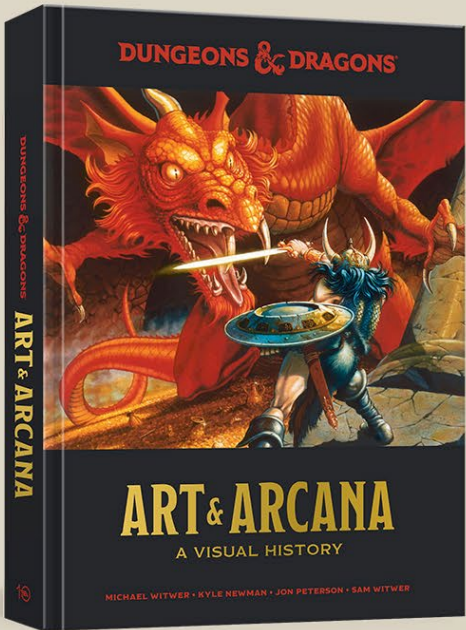
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# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

# ART & ARCANA

## A VISUAL HISTORY

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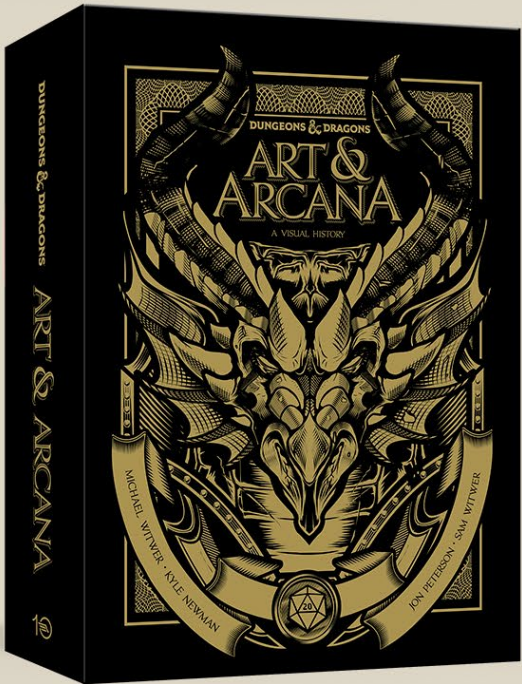
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## Interview: Rick and Morty

Matt Chapman had the genuine pleasure of chatting with Patrick Rothfuss and Jim Zub about a crossover comic they never thought would happen

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If the legend is true, this summer's biggest comic-book crossover came about thanks to a hypothetical 'what if?' conversation. When the teams from IDW and Oni Press went out for dinner they began joking about possible crossovers between their two publishing companies. What would be the weirdest combinations that they could imagine from the licenses they held?

"I don't know who came up with *Rick & Morty Vs. Dungeons & Dragons* but everyone at the table laughed," says writer Jim Zub. "Then I think it just stuck in their craw and they were like, 'This could be a thing. This could really work.'"



Patrick Rothfuss and Jim Zub

Zub had been writing the regular D&D comic series at IDW since fifth edition launched when Sarah Gaydos [formerly at IDW, now Editorial Director of Licensed Publishing at Oni Press] dropped him a line.

“She said, ‘This thing has come up and I don’t think it’s going to go away. Is this something you might be interested in?’ I love working on D&D and it’s near and dear to me so I said, ‘Yes, of course I’m interested. But this will never happen.’”

For Zub, the idea that “the crown jewel of Adult Swim” and “the granddaddy of all roleplaying games” could create a product *both* their companies would agree upon seemed unlikely. “I thought it would become one of those things we wistfully wished had happened but that never went through,” he remembers thinking. “It took Adult Swim and Wizards of the Coast a whole year to bring it to life.”

As the project came into focus, author Patrick Rothfuss was approached to co-write the scripts with Zub. “I went through a weird period where a lot of people approached me with some really flattering comic projects that it’s probably not polite for me to mention because I turned them down,” says the man who plays Viari in the Acquisitions Incorporated live games. “When this one came across my desk I excitedly but also grudgingly thought, ‘Oh no, I’m the right person for this.’ I love both of these things enough to not handle them so delicately that they will be good stories. So this is the one comic project that I said yes to out of many that would have been fun or cool.”

## Pitch Battles

“In my original pitch I said that D&D isn’t about monsters and treasure, it’s about story and character and people creating their own narrative. In the same way *Rick & Morty* isn’t about ultraviolence and mad science, it’s the story of a group of broken people who are desperately trying to love each other,” Rothfuss explains. “I said, ‘If that’s the story you want, bring me in. If not, you should really find someone else because that’s the story I want to tell.’”





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“What makes *Rick & Morty* really good and why the fan base is so broad is that you can look at the show as a really simple nihilistic violent outlet and that’s one level,” agrees Zub. “But that’s like

watching *Fight Club* and saying, ‘Hey we should all punch each other in the face. That’s what life’s all about.’ And you’re like, ‘That’s not what the movie’s about!’ You can look at *Rick & Morty* and realize that the characters are dealing with some real primordial stuff in terms of relationships as these broken people try to figure themselves out.”

“There are funny episodes as a whole but what makes me love the show is a series of startlingly emotional moments that hit in the middle of this ridiculous, ultra-violent, sci-fi nonsense. *Pickle Rick* is a fun episode and it’s neat but its moment is just 45 seconds where the therapist has her little monologue to Rick,” says Rothfuss.

“If that episode wins an Emmy it’s not because the writers very cleverly showed how Rick can go from being a pickle to being a ninja, killer pickle. That’s funny. But the Emmy will be for that moment where that therapist just strips every bit of skin off of Rick Sanchez and pins him down onto a card like a butterfly. I remember watching it and thinking about the reactions of the people watching street magic. If there are surprising or startling unnatural things that happen the audience will always bring their hands to their face and cover it.

“It’s a weird, instinctive reaction we have as a response to something that is scaring us in some way. As she delivered that monologue I remember moving back as she was talking and my hands were coming to cover my face. There’s no malice there but she is brutalizing this man. And I’m like, ‘Are they doing this?’ I was so stunned that was happening.”

“The fact that we can have this almost philosophical conversation about a show that is a like a weird version of *Back to the Future* by way of pop culture explosion is insane,” adds Zub. “We can tell a bigger story about bigger things even while we’re being insane and as brutal as ever. Our challenge is that I want a *Rick & Morty* fan to read this comic series and whether or not they play D&D they’re going to appreciate how D&D works. And on another level you want to have a D&D story that is very much us trying to say something about roleplaying games and that hobby and balancing that against the *Rick & Morty* characters.”

## Getting Schooled

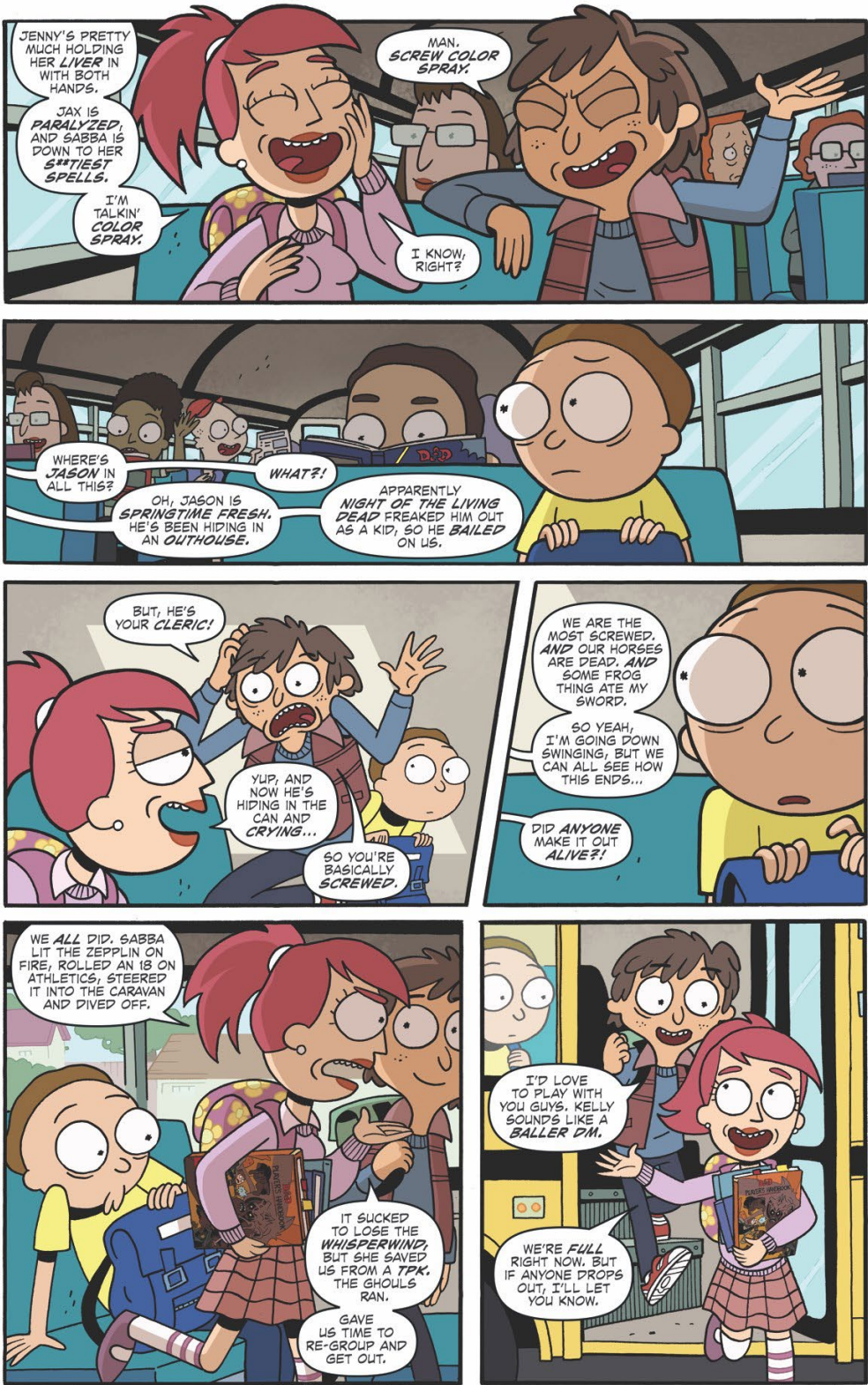
The mashup begins with Morty asking Rick for help to learn the game all the cool kids at his school are playing: Dungeons & Dragons. Naturally, things go horribly wrong as Rick, Morty, and the whole Smith family find themselves on an epic quest with no escape in sight.

“I don’t want to give away too much of the plot but Rick wants to teach Morty how to play D&D through the filter of first edition. That goes... poorly,” says Zub, making the pair laugh. “They then have to continually evolve their expectations and build together and understand what the game is. Then the rest of the family gets pulled into the vortex, for want of a better term.”

As much as we love the show’s two main characters, it’s great to hear that the wider Smith family is involved as they make such a good ensemble. It also begs the question of whether our scripting team were looking forward to featuring any particular member of that clan.

“For me it’s Jerry,” Rothfuss says without hesitation. “He was part of the original story that I wanted to tell. And when I floated that concept to the team I knew that was going to be the one that was either going to sink or swim. But the whole of the core family each gets to interact with D&D in their own facet. And in a couple of different ways because there are a bunch of stories across the issues.”





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His comments confirm that the four-issue run of comics isn't one single adventure and will feature multiple stories. That also allows the pair the opportunity to feature multiple versions of the D&D

roleplaying game, not just the current fifth edition iteration.

“We tear through the editions,” says Rothfuss before Zub adds: “As we move the game forward they try different iterations but it’s not just them sitting around a table rolling dice—although there are some aspects of that. Because this is *Rick & Morty* it starts to get into all sorts of interdimensional madness and their ability to actually embody some of the ideas of D&D and adventuring in this physical way becomes insane.”

“Looking back I had a lot of assumptions of what first edition was based on my memories,” Zub continues. “So it’s been weird for me over the last year or so to collect some of the old books that my brother and I had when we were younger and reread them.

“If you have the assumption that D&D today is the same as it’s always been then you have forgotten that third edition was such a huge change in terms of game balance and focal point. Fifth edition has been another huge leap in terms of bridging the old lore but also trying to make something that can appeal to just about everyone.

“It’s been neat to see where D&D came from and what this hobby is all about. Being able to filter that through someone like Rick Sanchez who has also been playing since first edition and has these power gamer assumptions allows us to showcase that old-school D&D mentality in a really cool, nostalgic way.”

## Lore and Order

For Zub, one of the great things about D&D is that it is not merely generic fantasy but it has its own lore and feel. Given that the first piece of art shown off for this project featured a beholder and a gelatinous cube, the signs are strong that we’ll see plenty of classic D&D Easter eggs.

“When I first started working on the D&D comic that was one of the things I talked to them about, the fact that D&D is not just save-the-princess, corny fantasy. It has got its own very specific ingredients,” says Zub.

“In the third issue of the current D&D comic series, *Evil at Baldur’s Gate*, one of the characters ends up going to Mechanus and it’s the

first time—as far as I know—that the other planes of existence have been shown in the D&D comics. [Unless you count the pocket dimension of Barovia/Ravenloft – ed] So the idea of things like modrons feels very D&D to me but it's out there and it is not your typical fantasy stuff. But I'm like, if we've got it lets really flaunt it. Let's do the weirdness and really show people what makes D&D so special.”

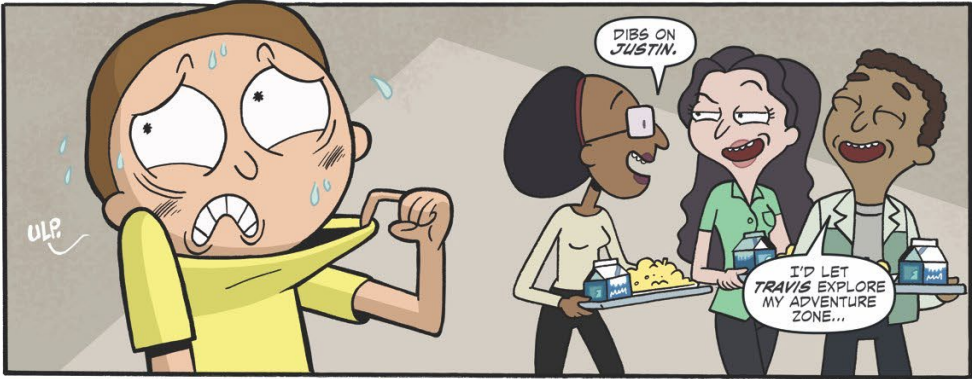
Rothfuss agrees: “Jim made a real deep pull in one of these issues where he inserted one of the monsters and I was like, ‘Wow, let's go man.’ People that are new to this will look at it and think what goofy nonsense did Rothfuss and Zub come up with.”

Giving the comic that authentic D&D feel was really important to the pair. It's something Zub is already familiar with from his role on IDW's D&D comic and he's always got the game in mind when he's writing.

“People ask me if I keep the stats in mind so it's like real D&D when I'm writing the comic. But from the magic to the storytelling possibilities, real D&D is incredibly flexible. You can make it quote-unquote canon without missing out on telling a good story. That's the whole point.”

“And we're also dealing with multiple canons,” adds Rothfuss. “Of course you love best what you love first and Rick started with AD&D so when he goes to show Morty D&D that's what he shows him. So now we're going to tell an AD&D story and I actually know where those books are, so I have to make sure I'm getting my math right there.





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“I’ve been trying to get it all right on my side as I draft it but the D&D team has been very nice. I showed the script to my one of my friends and he said, ‘Hold on, save versus wands?!’ Yeah, these are

the old ways. Then it goes to their lore master and they make a correction and I'm like, 'Thank you!' Because I know there are other people out there like me who just lived in these books thirty years ago and they're not going to want to look at this and see that it's ninety per cent right. Ninety per cent right is wrong!"

Zub admits that there was a moment in issue two where he wrote a caption that said, 'Experience total' and then in brackets added 'we'll just let the Wizards team figure it out'.

"I could calculate this but they'll know it better than I do," he says. "The notes I got back were, 'Well, in second edition D&D experience points were relative to character level so we need to know what the whole party total is...' and that's why we have those guys."

## Art and Soul

The other element that needs to grasp all these difficult concepts, put them in a blender and somehow pour out something beautiful is the artwork. Zub and Rothfuss are aware they've been giving comic artist Troy Little an incredibly hard time because their script deals with multiple editions of D&D and they are keen to lavish "unbearable amounts of praise" onto him.

"We're sending him art from first edition, second edition and onwards and he's got to switch and keep track of it all and make it all look distinctive and interesting, while dealing with setting material, character notes and weird surrealistic dimension hopping," says Zub. "Every time I'm sending him these insane art notes I'm like, 'Why are we doing this to this poor guy? He's such a skilled artist and we're dragging him through the coals. And he's doing it without complaint. He is an absolute trooper!'"

"It's kind of like saying, 'OK, now do these four pages in Middle English. Nobody does it like this anymore but some people remember when it used to be like that,'" adds Rothfuss.

Yet the pair note that the majority of the work has gone through really smoothly, which has been surprising on a project that includes three editors, two publishers, two license holders and multiple other levels of corporate oversight.

“One of the good things about being in this modern era of nerd synergy is that companies realize that it’s OK to make fun and do the things that a decade ago would never have passed the sniff test,” Zub says.

“I’ve done a few things that touch upon other people’s intellectual property but normally I am the license holder, I’m the tyrant,” says Rothfuss. “But my heart has never been broken with them bouncing back a note. They’ve never said we can’t have this or this is all wrong or anything like that. I thought we’d be playing a lot more chicken with them where we’d be putting stuff in and daring them to take it out but for the most part they’ve said, ‘Yes, that tracks.’”

“What’s been so much fun about this project is that every time I think they’re going to reign us in the vast majority of the time they really haven’t. In the way that only your best friend can make fun of you, really cut you to the core in a way that’s true, Pat and I have been gleefully doing that. We’ve been able to warts-and-all play with the D&D canon in that way,” reveals Zub.

“A big reason that our approvals go really well is that Jim has worked with them and proven himself and they trust Jim,” Rothfuss says, with Zub quickly adding: “I’ve built up credit that we’re now rapidly spending!”

## Channeling the Insanity

What’s great to hear is that both creators are as excited about this project as the fans are.

“I’m really proud of what we’ve put together,” says Zub. “And that Troy is able to channel the insanity that we’re cramming into the scripts because a comic lives or dies on the visuals. If that character performance doesn’t come through in the panels it doesn’t matter what was written in the script or how much we might want it to feel a certain way. Troy gets the final word in terms of the visual expression of those characters and he has been knocking it out of the park.

“Working on D&D in general just doing the comic series has been such a trip and a real nostalgia ride for me. I constantly have to pinch myself because eight-year-old me can’t believe this is happening and



that we get to have these amazing opportunities! Then to have people respond strongly to it is the best.

“The reality is that D&D is a property that is seeing a huge resurgence with a younger audience and there’s a potential there to grab hold of that. What Pat and I are trying to do is bridge some of those classic elements of D&D and play with those old tropes but also bring them into a modern context. All using the nihilistic *Rick & Morty* cast as a way to project ideas about family and storytelling.”

## Variant Character Sheet Covers

“We threw a bunch of different ideas into the mix when it came to variant covers. Our editors had to channel that lightning into a jar. But I think the ones that people are going to be most excited about are the character sheet variants,” says Jim Zub. “If you want to assemble the final fifth edition party that we use in issues three and four, there’s going to be a series of variants that are going to come out with their actual stats and other character bits. The first one is going to be Morty. You’ll be able to pull together the whole adventuring party and send them into disaster in your own game.

“Rick’s favorite first edition character, his archmage, will also appear in the back of issue one. It’s been created in the old-school AD&D style. I’ve seen the final sheet and it is a scream. There’s some really, really fun stuff on there.

“Nate [Sharp] didn’t just create a generic character sheet for us, he made it look like someone handwrote the sheet. So it’s got all the little scrawl in the margins and ridiculous little character notes and badass sketches like you’d put on your character sheet back in the day. It looks wonderful.”

“Nate is a deep-in-the-paint old-school D&D player as well, so I knew that he would be able to ring that bell for us,” adds Patrick Rothfuss.

**To find out more about the four-issue comic-book series *Rick & Morty Versus D&D* visit the [IDW website](#) . Issue one is available in all good comic stores on 29 August.**

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# D&D Toons: Six Faces of Death

Jason Thompson returns with not one, not two,  
but six faces of death!

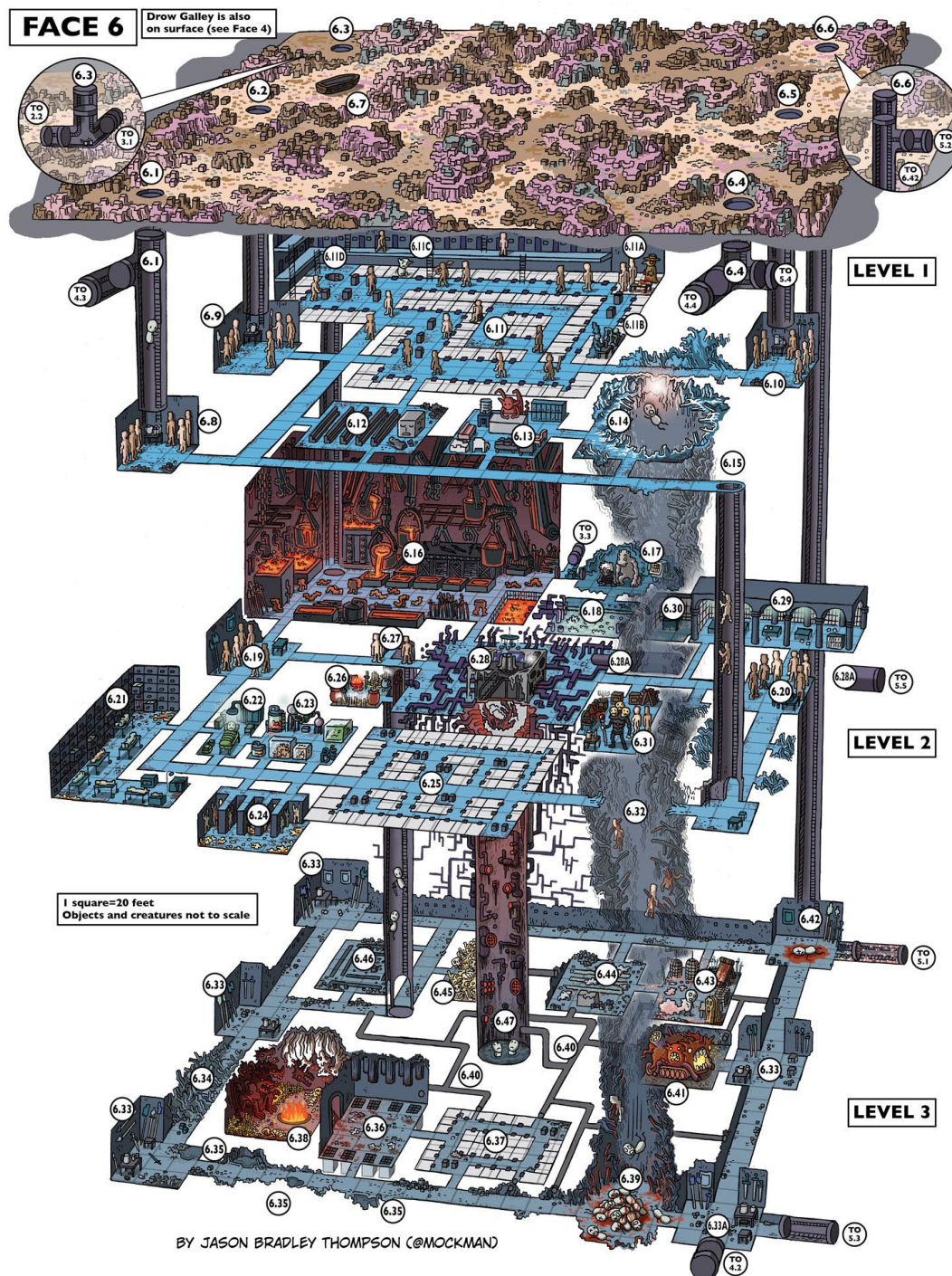
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Leave it to Jason Thompson! We ask him for a cartoon map based on *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*, and he goes and creates an entire adventure scenario as well! In *Six Faces of Death*:

*A mad modron? Impossible! And yet it exists. An alien being, dark omens and vanishing ships send the adventurers to a mysterious island newly appeared in the Sea of Swords. Can they uncover the mysteries of Changing Island and save Faerûn from a terror from another plane?*

You can also find some of the maps from the scenario available below:





(Select to view)

[Download: Six Faces of Death](#)

## Dungeons and Doodles

Our latest Dungeons & Doodles episode has now aired! This time, Stan!, Richard Whitters, and special guest Tyler Jacobson joined this

*Dragon+* livestream. The topics we asked them to draw?

1. **KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCKING ON THE CASTLE DOOR:** Sometimes in battle a general has to improvise. Draw an unusual device that an army could use to lay siege to a castle!
2. **MY LITTLE MONSTROSITY:** Chibi-versions of horrible creatures are all the rage on t-shirts, vinyl figures, and other collectible items. Draw a cute version of a \_\_\_\_\_ that can take the merch world by storm!
3. **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TORTLES:** The “heroes in a half-shell” are all ninjas but in D&D a party needs a variety of different character classes. We’re putting together an adventuring party made up entirely of anthropomorphic creatures (humanoid versions of common animals). Draw a party of \_\_\_\_\_.
4. **TEACH ME HOW TO DRAW A...:** Interested in learning to doodle yourself? Let’s ask each of our artists in turn to choose an iconic D&D monster (their choice), and talk us through some initial instruction on how to draw them!

And, their finished pieces—enjoy!

[Download: Dungeons & Doodles](#)

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### About the Artist

Comic artist, author and illustrator Jason Thompson currently runs a Monday night gaming group in San Francisco. His works include the Eisner-nominated *Manga: The Complete Guide*, *King of RPGs*, *H.P. Lovecraft’s The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, and the tabletop game *Mangaka: The Fast & Furious Game of Drawing Comics*. His favorite things to draw are landscapes, plants, reptiles and amphibians.

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# SIX FACES OF DEATH

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**A dark fantasy adventure for characters of 11th to 13th level**



*An alien being, dark omens, and vanishing ships send the adventurers to a mysterious island newly appeared in the Sea of Swords. But can the characters uncover the mysteries of the Changing Island in time to save Faerûn from a terror from another plane?*

Design and Cartography by  
**Jason Bradley Thompson**

Editing and Development by  
**Scott Fitzgerald Gray**



Beyond the Material Plane lie dimensions where gods and devils dwell, and where pure ideals are embodied in physical form. One such place is Mechanus, the plane of ultimate law, where the geometric modrons maintain absolute order. Another is Acheron, home to endless battlefields of law and evil, where reborn warriors fight eternal conflicts of metal and blood.

No stars or suns appear in the skies of Acheron—only floating metal cubes hurtling through the void. One of these was Cube 1717, designed by a mad derro architect named Avnas, and ruled by a powerful devil named Earl Andromalius—a servant of the god of tyranny, Lord Bane.

Cube 1717's primary purpose was as a battle station in Acheron's endless wars. But it also contained a prison and laboratory where horrifying experiments were carried out upon court-martialed soldiers and other doomed souls. Some became food for horrid monsters. Others were used for weapons testing and destroyed by steel and hellfire. Once, three particularly cunning conspirators who tried to unseat Earl Andromalius were fused together into a horrible undead entity—a skull lord named Vargo, doomed to suffer forever in the prisons of the cube.

## UNEXPECTED VISITOR

Not long ago, a planar rift brought an unusual creature to Acheron, where it was discovered by Earl Andromalius's servants. It was a quadrone—one of the cubical warriors of the modrons, left broken in body and mind by being cut off from the order of Mechanus.

When the creature was brought to Avnas, the insane derro subjected it to bizarre experiments that drove the already unstable quadrone completely mad. Under the duress of the testing, the quadrone was corrupted by the magic of Acheron to develop a heretofore unheard-of power: the ability to control other beings and make them into creatures like itself.

Exponentially growing in power and size, the Archquadrone escaped its captivity and penetrated to the engine room at the heart of Cube 1717. There, it fused its body with the cube's engines, creating a living brain whose first task was to instigate the deadly **pixelating curse**—a magical malady that transforms creatures and objects into lawful neutral cube creatures serving the dictates of the Archquadrone.

The infection spread quickly throughout Cube 1717, transforming thousands of Acheronian soldiers into cube-like mockeries of life. Earl Andromalius was killed and overthrown, and with the power of Cube 1717 at their command, the Archquadrone's cube-creatures soon threatened Acheron itself.

To deal with this threat, the princes and dukes of Acheron were forced to seek the aid of the yugoloths—mercenary creatures of pure evil. The strength of their combined forces allowed the devils and the yugoloths to besiege the cube, slaughtering its defenders. In the end, the yugoloths were forced to use the River Styx as a weapon, inundating Cube 1717 with its waters to cleanse both the memories of the dead and the curse that infected them.

## PREPARATION AND PLANNING

*Six Faces of Death* is a dark fantasy adventure featuring countless fiends, mind control, strange physical transformations, and dead bodies by the thousands. Before running the scenario, you'll want to make sure that your players are aware that the adventure features plenty of dark imagery and horror themes. Even then, you might want to downplay some of the more graphic descriptions contained herein, according to your own sensibilities as a DM and the ages and sensitivities of your players.

The adventure is also a dangerous one—and might prove a challenge even for powerful 11th-to-13th-level characters! On the bright side, though, the scenario also features a lot of humor that you can use to lighten the overall dark tone. And as with many *Dungeons & Dragons* adventures, the difficulty level can be adjusted on the fly by giving the characters allies (the monodrone, the shadar-kai, the drow, and potentially even the oinoloth and the hydroloths), making sure they learn appropriate background information before they travel to the mysterious island, and adjusting the efficiency of the enemies' lair defense.

Before the adventure begins, take note of whether any characters are chaotic. This is important in determining how resistant they are to the Archquadrone's pixelating curse.

To run a particularly dangerous version of the adventure, use pregenerated characters and start the adventure with a shipwreck that leaves the party stranded on the Changing Island with no preparation. Can the characters uncover the island's many mysteries—and how long will they survive as they try?

Attempting to escape, the Archquadrone's pixelated servants tore open a planar rift that sent Cube 1717 hurtling into the Material Plane. In a storm of fire and infernal energy, the cube appeared above the Sea of Swords in western Faerûn before sinking into its depths.

## SIGNS AND SURVIVORS

Most of the Archquadrone's servants died and were unpixelated in the Styx's purifying waters. But deep within the cube—at the bottom of the Sea of Swords and still surrounded by a bubble of black Styx water—a handful of entities survived: Avnas the derro, whose chaotic nature had temporarily protected her from the pixelation; a group of abishai priests of Tiamat who were protected by the power of a sacred statue of their god; and the skull lord Vargo, who managed to escape its imprisonment during the chaos of the battle. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more on the derro, the abishai, and the skull lord.)

Exploring the sunken cube's lightless depths, Vargo came to the central engine room, where it found the Archquadrone failing and close to destruction. With the combined intelligence of its three heads, Vargo discovered that it could attach those heads to parts of the Archquadrone's six-sided brain to bring Cube 1717 back to life—and to make itself the cube's master. The control system Vargo created is called the Six-Face Throne, a complex device that has allowed the skull lord to restore the cube's internal power and gravity systems, and to bring it to the surface of the Sea of Swords.



Word of the cube's destination reached the yugoloths, who became alarmed at it having been reactivated—and doubly alarmed that the Acheronians might ask for their money back. A strike force sent out to finish the job of destroying the cube ended in failure, though—and with the capture of an oinoloth that was one of the force's leaders. The hextons of Mechanus sent their own forces to finish the job, but those too were overcome. Word of this strange new island then brought numerous sailors and explorers into the area to investigate, but all have been killed or captured—with survivors forced to join Vargo's pixelated army.

## THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

When an important NPC vanishes in the area of the mysterious island, the adventurers are inspired or called upon to investigate. Traveling to the Changing Island with a mad monodrone (a survivor of the modron strike force) as their guide, they must find and rescue their pixelated friend, defeat the skull lord, and end the curse.

But Vargo has been waiting for just such an opportunity, hoping to entice highly intelligent adventurers to the island. By grafting the severed heads of those individuals onto its own body, the undead hopes to become a six-headed skull lord and fully reactivate Cube 1717, turning it into a flying, mobile battle station with thousands of pixel soldiers under its undead command.

Can the adventurers stop the combined forces of pure evil and pure law? Or will all Faerûn become a pixelated wasteland in thrall to the six faces of death?

## CHARACTERS AND FACTIONS

The following roster summarizes the key NPCs and monsters the characters are likely to meet during the adventure.

### CONTROLLERS OF THE CUBE

Vargo and its servants control Cube 1717, and will do whatever it takes to maintain the skull lord's hold on the cube's power.

**Vargo.** Created from the bodies of three evil adventurers, the **skull lord**<sup>M</sup> Vargo has spent hundreds of years in Acheron. The personalities of the undead's three heads have merged over that time. It commands all the pixelated creatures and controls three faces of the Six-Face Throne—two directly, and the third



through its servant, Sladek. Vargo seeks sufficiently intelligent adventurers to graft onto itself, allowing it to activate the cube's full power and conquer Faerûn. See area 6.31 for more information.

**Sladek.** A genasi mage who journeyed to the island and became pixelated, Sladek is the NPC who inspires the characters' rescue mission—but they are unaware that he is now a pixelated **mage**, one of Vargo's allies, and one of the controllers of the Six-Face Throne. The most intelligent of the pixelated creatures transformed by the cube, Sladek now seeks to spread the pixelating curse to every living creature. See area 6.11B for more information.

**Avnas.** This crazed **derro savant**<sup>M</sup> is a mad scientist, an architect, and the only survivor of Earl Andromalius's retinue. She serves Vargo out of a mad desire to see what might happen if the skull lord is able to claim the power it seeks. See area 6.17 for more information.

**Bunch.** A **berbalang** that came to the island to gather the bones of the dead, Bunch is resistant to the pixelating curse because of the creature's extraplanar nature. (The **berbalang** appears in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*.) It serves Vargo in return for skulls and bones. See area 6.13 for more information.

**Balhannoth and Oblex.** A **balhannoth** was brought onto the island by a party of drow explorers as a servitor monster. Transformed into a pixelated creature, it now serves Vargo and Sladek. An **adult oblex** is the product of one of the horrid experiments conducted

### MONSTERS AND MAGIC

Most of the monsters in this adventure are taken from *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. When a monster name appears in bold, it means that creature appears either in that book or the *Monster Manual*. The first time a monster appears in the adventure, the text notes if it appears in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. If the name appears in bold thereafter, a superscript 'M' indicates that the creature appears in that book.

A number of new magic items found on Cube 1717 are found in the "New Magic Items" appendix at the end of the adventure. All other magic items are found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.



in Cube 1717's laboratory. It, too, serves the skull lord. The balhannoth and the oblex both appear in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. See "Face 5: Beautiful Island" for more information.

## OTHER FACTIONS

A number of creatures within the cube might prove to be friends or foes to the characters—or both.

**'Nameless.'** Met by the characters at the start of the mission, this mad **monodrone** has suffered damage that has caused it to go rogue. Terrified of the "bad square boss" inside the cube island, it picks one of the characters as its new boss and latches onto them, following them anywhere—but communication with the creature is difficult. See "Mad Monodrone," below, for more information.

**Fern.** The only survivor of a shadar-kai expedition to explore the island, Fern is a shadar-kai **shadow dancer** with partial memory loss as a result of contact with Styx water. She seeks to find Astilbe, a fallen friend. See area 1.3 for more information on Fern, and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more on the shadar-kai.

**Simak.** This **drow house captain** is the only survivor of a drow expedition she led to the island, and has kept herself alive by becoming a kind of court jester to Vargo. Simak originally came to the cube hoping to activate its power and use it as a flying war engine, but her primary goal now is to make a safe escape. See area 6.11C for more information on Simak, and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more on the drow.

By sheer chance, a family-heirloom *amulet of the Styx* that Simak wears makes her immune to the pixelating curse, because of the Styx water it holds inside it. See the "New Magic Items" appendix for more information.

**Abishai Priests.** A group of **white abishai** and **black abishai** are worshipers of Tiamat whose faith saved them when Cube 1717 was nearly destroyed. Still unpixelated, they have so far avoided Vargo and are desperate to escape the island. See area 6.38 and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more information on the abishai.

**Malika Tahoun.** This plague-ridden **oinoloth** was the leader of the yugoloth strike force sent to the material realm to destroy the cube. As utterly selfish as all yugoloths, it surrendered to Vargo to avoid being killed. Vargo is keeping Malika around as a backup controller for the Six-Face Throne, in the event that the skull lord can't find a sufficient number of new heads. (It won't graft the oinoloth's head onto itself, because the creature's plagues can infect even its undead body.) See area 6.11A for more information on Malika, and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more on oinoloths.

Malika wears an airtight outfit that protects it from infection by the pixelating curse, and that also protects those around the oinoloth from its multitude of diseases. The mask and gloves also conceals the oinoloth's fiendish appearance.

**Hydroloths.** The only other survivors of the yugoloth assault lurk in what the denizens of the cube call "the Styx sea"—the volume of black Styx water that surrounds the island. While they wait for Malika Tahoun to return, they kill any creatures that might

spread the pixelating curse. See "Invisible Guardians" and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more information on the hydroloths.

## RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

*Six Faces of Death* is a wide-open adventure, in which random chance and the players' choices are the only determiners of their progress through Cube 1717.

In the first stage of the adventure, the characters investigate the mysterious Changing Island. This stage plays out largely as a mystery and survival story, as the characters deal with deadly hydroloths, vampiric mist, the random rotation of the cube, and other threats. Figuring out how to get inside is the primary challenge of this section of the adventure—but that challenge can take many forms, depending on which faces of the cube the characters have a chance to explore.

Once they get inside, the characters' primary motivation is to fight the cube's defenders as they learn more about its origin and purpose. Against the overarching goal of rescuing the genasi mage Sladek, the characters might also decide that they're obliged to destroy the cube, wanting to prevent its destructive power from being unleashed in Faerûn.

Alternatively, instead of fighting the cube's defenders, the characters might parley with them. This could be an even more dangerous option, however, since the skull lord Vargo has diabolical plans for suitably intelligent guests. If the characters do parley with the evil defenders of the cube, take the opportunity to roleplay the disturbing, diabolical, and potentially funny personalities of those defenders.

Exploring the cube makes for a classic and challenging "invade the fortress" scenario. Pixelated creatures can all communicate telepathically with each other to a range of 120 feet, making it easy for them to advise other pixelated creatures or the skull lord of the movements and positions of intruders. If higher-level characters are having too easy a time against the cube's pixelated guardians, you can easily add additional guardians or give them maximum hit points to raise the challenge.

Pixelated merregon devils and pixelated veterans serve as the cube's guards (see the "Pixelated Guards" sidebar on the next page). Other pixelated creatures that can join a coordinated defense of the fortress include Avnas and her gray render (see area 6.17), the skull lord's personal army of zombies and skeletons in area 6.21, and the adult oblex and the balhannoth from face 5.

If the characters end up overwhelmed by the threats on the cube, you might want to throw them a lifeline in the form of unexpected help. Perhaps the shadar-kai and the drow expeditions weren't totally wiped out, and their forces are also currently exploring the cube to draw off its defenders or join in during a key fight.

On top of all the other dangers of the cube, the characters must finish their quest and escape the island before the pixelating curse transforms them into pixelated creatures. Only characters who are immune to disease can ignore this threat, and characters who can



cure disease (as well as spellcasters who can cast *dispel magic* or *remove curse*) will be kept busy.

If certain characters become infected, players who enjoy roleplaying might like the additional challenge of having infected characters become increasingly at odds with their healthy companions. Especially when a character reaches mental level 3 of the curse, let the character's player interpret their insanity rather than you telling them what their character is doing.

## THE SKULL LORD'S PLAN

As all its heads once were in life, Vargo is intelligent and charismatic, and the skull lord won't foolishly rush into battle with intruders. If at all possible, it tries to approach the characters as potential allies, assuring them that despite its horrific undead appearance, it wants to be a resource for them. Vargo will describe itself as being trapped on the cube, and will encourage characters to work with it so they can all safely escape.

Vargo is never without its bodyguards (see area 6.31). But if the skull lord has the chance, it presents those bodyguards as 'captors', similar to the two pixelated guards watching Malika Tahoun in area 6.11A.

Vargo might make use of any or all of the following deceptions and half-truths when talking to the characters:

- Vargo didn't cause the pixelating curse (true), and doesn't even know where it came from (technically true). The skull lord is as ignorant as the characters are about what's going on (false).
- Vargo's enemies are ruthless evil fiends—the yugoloths—who will also kill the characters if they find them on the cube (true). Vargo and the party must work together to stop them!

### PIXELATED GUARDS

Two types of guards now serve the skull lord, and can be found throughout the cube. Merregon devils (from *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*) originally served as sentries on Cube 1717, and are joined now by humanoid veterans representing both the reborn souls that once fought and died in Acheron and the adventurers and sailors that have been pixelated since coming to the island.

Transformed by the pixelating curse, a pixelated **merregon** or pixelated **veteran** has its original statistics with the following changes:

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- It is immune to the frightened condition.
- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

If you add additional guards to the adventure, you can use pixelated merregons or pixelated veterans, as you choose. Pixelated veterans might show differences in their arms, armor, and physical features, and representatives of the drow and the shadar-kai that came to the island might be found among them.

Not all the humanoids who came to the island were veterans, but using the veteran stat block is a useful shortcut during play. If any pixelated veterans are returned to their normal form, you can use other statistics for them that are more appropriate.

- Vargo is a prisoner of the pixelated creatures (false), which seek to capture the characters as well (true).
- The cube is a damaged flying battle station, which Vargo has figured out how to reactivate (true). Only sufficiently intelligent people can interface with the cube (true), and if the characters help the skull lord reactivate it, they can all make use of its power (false).
- The cube is capable of traveling from plane to plane (false). Vargo just wants to reactivate the cube so that it can leave the Material Plane (false; Vargo wants to conquer the Material Plane).
- The pixelated creatures aren't innately evil (technically true but irrelevant; the pixelated creatures' overarching goal is to spread the pixelation curse to all things).
- Vargo was a prisoner in the cube for hundreds of years, cruelly punished for trying to overthrow the cube's devil lord (true). Thus, the skull lord would never inflict such suffering on anyone else (false).

If the characters engage Vargo, the skull lord attempts to use them in one of three ways. First, it wants their aid in defeating the hydroloths that guard the waters around the cube, and in destroying the vampiric mists on the surface. Second, it hopes to see them become pixelated, coming under its control as they join its army of pixelated creatures. Third, the skull lord wants to use characters with an Intelligence of 14 or higher to attune to the Six-Face Throne, making the cube even more powerful.



PIXELATED MERREGON



## GETTING AHEAD

Vargo doesn't tell the characters that they can simply plug themselves into the Six-Face Throne to attune to it (see area 6.28), sharing the power of the cube as equals. The skull lord's much more evil plan is to identify a character or NPC with an Intelligence of 14 or higher, take them to the surgery at area 6.22, get the drop on them—then sever the character's head for grafting onto the skull lord's own shoulders. Vargo's shoulders have room for six heads in total, and the skull lord believes that any newly grafted head will be at least temporarily dominated by its own preexisting personality. The extra head will thus simply serve as an extra brain with which to unlock more powers of the cube.

From the moment Vargo and Bunch (the skull lord's berbalang assistant, who knows of its plan) begin interacting with the characters, both try to assess their intelligence. Bunch uses obvious questions and intelligence tests (see area 6.13), but Vargo is more clever. It might ply the characters with questions about history or scholarly knowledge, or challenge them to games in the library (area 6.29). Vargo focuses on wizards for special attention.

Once it has a fairly good idea which characters are the smartest, the skull lord tries to separate them from their companions. Other characters are allowed to roam the fortress (but not to go out onto the surface), with Vargo hoping that they eventually pixelate. Intelligent characters are attacked, incapacitated (the brain donor must be alive before the procedure), and dragged to the surgery so Vargo can operate.

In the interest of not railroading a character into this fate, Vargo takes an NPC as its first target, starting with Fern or Simak (if the drow's subterfuge of idiocy fails). If the skull lord gains a fourth head, its first action is to make that head start drinking the Styx water that one of its own heads must drink to counter the pixelating curse. As a result, it regains its full skull lord statistics (see area 6.31). The skull lord also becomes visibly taller, though this has no immediate game effect.

If the new head is an NPC, Vargo automatically succeeds at crushing its personality and turning it into nothing more than spare memory storage for the skull lord's dominant brains. If the new head is a character, give the character's player a chance for the head to retain its sense of self by succeeding on two out of three consecutive Charisma contests against Vargo. If the character succeeds, the player retains the ability to speak, think, and occasionally control Vargo's body by winning Charisma contests as you determine.

Only a *wish* spell can restore a character whose head has been grafted onto the skull lord. As Vargo adds more heads, its personality becomes more cold and megalomaniacal—even as occasional flashes of the preferences and personalities of the minds it has absorbed come to the fore.

## THE SUPER SKULL LORD

If Vargo gains a fifth head, the skull lord continues to grow in stature and power. In addition to becoming taller, its statistics change as follows:

- Its Strength increases to 16. This increases the attack and damage modifiers of its bone staff attack by 1.
- Its Constitution increases to 19. This increases its hit points to 119 (14d8 + 56).

If the skull lord gains a sixth head, it grows even taller and its final statistics change as follows:

- Its Strength increases to 18. This increases the attack and damage modifiers of its bone staff attack by 1.
- Its Constitution increases to 21. This increases its hit points to 133 (14d8 + 70).
- Its Charisma increases to 23. This increases its spell save DC to 19 and its spell attack bonus to +11.

## MISSING SHIPS AND TALKING CUBES

The adventure begins in a lawless port city from which the characters set out to the Changing Island, an hour away by ship. The assumed setting is the Sea of Swords, but you can modify the adventure to start out in any chaotic port city in Faerûn or another campaign world.

## STARTING POINTS

Any of the following locations make a good start to the adventure in a Forgotten Realms campaign.

**Waterdeep.** The greatest city of the Sword Coast features numerous guilds, magical orders, mercantile enterprises, adventuring companies, and criminal organizations that might have an interest in exploring the Changing Island. Alternatively, you might decide to start the adventure off in Skullport. This underground city of criminals, slavers, and evil mages lies beneath Waterdeep, and is part of the great dungeon complex of Undermountain.

**Athkatla.** "The city of coin" is a huge port city of humans and halflings. With over a hundred thousand inhabitants, the city is the capital of the land of Amn, just south of the Sword Coast. Numerous powerful factions here might already be vying for control of the Changing Island by the time the characters set out to explore it.

**Ioma.** Home to fewer than a thousand people, Ioma is one of several small pirate ports in the Nelanther Isles, south of the Sea of Swords. The Nelanther pirates are cruel and lawless, and Ioma is ruled with an iron fist by a small group of Cowled Wizards—members of a secret arcane order in Amn.

**Port Nyanzaru.** The capital of the jungle peninsula of Chult, Port Nyanzaru is detailed in *Tomb of Annihilation*. Though not as lawless and dangerous as some of the other cities in this section, it makes an excellent potential starting point for the adventure.

**Ajayib.** Sometimes called the City of Wonders, Ajayib is one of the "Pearl Cities"—wealthy seaports on the coast of the desert land of Zakhara, far to the south of the Sword Coast.

**Dragonisle.** Moving the adventure to the Sea of Fallen Stars, inland and east of the Sword Coast, gives you the option to use Dragonisle as a starting point. The largest of the Pirate Isles, the island is dominated by the eight-thousand-foot-high mountain known as the Earthspur.



Some four thousand pirates dwell here, with most found in the city sometimes known as Immurk's Hold.

## FRIENDS AND ALLIES

The setup of the adventure assumes that the characters know people in the port close to where the Changing Island has appeared. But if you're playing the adventure as a one-shot, or if you want to give the characters an additional NPC ally in the area, you can introduce them to Lem—a local **priest** of Kelemvor, Lord of the Dead.

Clad in gray and lawful neutral in alignment, Lem works to prepare dead bodies for burial by bathing them in scented holy water, thus ritually washing away their sins. She gladly offers advice on the afterlife, undead, curses, and similar matters, and can provide *potions of healing* if the characters need them.

When the characters meet with Lem, she confides to them that a few nights earlier, she had a dark dream warning her of evil on the Changing Island. As such, she warns them to be careful on their journey.

## THE MYSTERIOUS CHANGING ISLAND

Whatever port the adventurers start out in, they soon hear that a mysterious island has recently appeared in the sea, an hour away by ship. No one has set foot on the island and come back to tell the tale, and sailors have given conflicting descriptions of it, causing it to be nicknamed “the Changing Island.”

The mysterious island was first sighted two weeks before. Since then, the following information has become known to all folk in the port where the adventure begins. Be sure to give the characters this information before they leave port. Establishing the mystery of the Changing Island gives the players a number of vital clues they need before they go there.

- Shortly after the island was first sighted, the sea around it became covered by an unnaturally thick bank of fog. That fog never lifts, leaving the island in a perpetual gray twilight.
- The water around the island is somehow different than the surrounding sea. It is black and silty, offers poor visibility, and feels unnaturally cold. No fish swim in this mysterious black water, which features a clear dividing line from the blue-green sea.
- The island is unnaturally square and about six hundred feet across. A number of hills and valleys can be seen rising beyond the shore, but it's impossible to make out details through the fog.
- A number of explorers have landed ships on the island, but none have returned to tell of what they found. A number of the ships that approached the island have vanished, while others have been found floating with their crews missing. No useful clues have been recovered from these derelict ships.
- “The Changing Island” is so-named because those who pass by it have given a number of conflicting descriptions of it. Some say that the island is nothing but bare stone, featuring terraces of sharp, angular rock in white, red, black, and bronze. Others have talked of the island appearing as a pleasant green atoll of palm trees and plant life, with sandy beaches.

- Most disturbingly, some witnesses have described the island as covered with bodies, as if the place were the site of some terrible battle. A large number of the fallen appeared to be armored soldiers of various races, but most were as naked as the day they were born.

In addition to the well-known lore above, the following information can be discovered by adventurers who research the island while in port. The manner of research is up to you, but might involve Intelligence (Investigation) checks, talking to background contacts, use of the *legend lore* spell, and so forth. Not all the rumors the characters hear will be true. False rumors, or elements of larger rumors that are false, are *italicized* below.

- The island sometimes submerges and rises again. *The crew of one ship saw a giant eyestalk rise out of the water. The island is nothing less than a giant monster!*
- A sailor who fell into the black water was struck dumb in an instant. Even after being hauled out, their mind was like a child's, leaving them not knowing their own name and barely able to speak.
- Monstrous creatures were seen on the island—some sort of two-legged half-dragons with icy white skin and bat wings. They ran to the waterline and howled at the terrified sailors passing by, but didn't take flight to pursue them.
- Not only is the island covered with the dead, *but those dead periodically rise to walk about and reach out to passing ships. There must be thousands of zombies there!*
- A seagull was seen to land on the island to peck at the dead bodies there. It was killed by a tentacle that seemed to grow out of the fog, grabbing the bird and tearing it apart!
- A mighty drow galley was seen in the waters near the island. *Whispered rumors talk of the island as channeling some kind of demonic power, drawing the dark elves from their underground lairs.*
- A mysterious ship carrying those strange shadow-loving folk, the shadar-kai, was seen in the waters near the island.
- *The island is covered with great heaps of glittering jewels!*
- A smoking crater rises at the center of the island. While sailors watched, it blasted out an eruption—not of lava, but of what looked like the bodies of the dead!
- Three days before the island and the black water appeared, a lone fisher reported hearing a great thunderclap and seeing an enormous cube of rock fall from the heavens. Red flames and black smoke followed its passing, as did a shrieking like the voices of a thousand fiends. The fiery cube fell into the sea and disappeared.

## RESCUE MISSION

The characters enter the adventure when they are tasked with finding a mage who has vanished while exploring the island. This character might be an old NPC acquaintance of one of the other characters, or



the party could be hired by others who want the mage located and returned.

Sladek is a neutral good genasi **mage** called “Sladek the Blue” for his blue skin and dark blue robes. Local folk know that the mage is fascinated by geology and geography, and that he hired a small boat with six sailors and went to investigate the new island a week before. He and the sailors have not been seen since.

When Sladek ventured onto the island, he was captured by pixelated guards and converted into a pixelated creature. He now serves as Vargo the skull lord’s second-in-command. The sailors were either captured and converted to pixelated creatures or killed by the hydroloths guarding the island, who also tore the ship apart.

If the characters don’t know Sladek, they are hired by the mage’s order to determine what happened to him. Such organizations might include the Watchful Order of Magists and Protectors if the adventure starts in Waterdeep, the Cowled Wizards of Amn if it starts in Ioma, or the Zhentarim in any starting point location.

A servant of the order approaches the characters—Saberhagen, a low-level neutral **diviner** whose green robes match his short, dyed beard. On behalf of his order, Saberhagen offers the characters 5,000 gp each if they can rescue Sladek and return his possessions, or 3,000 gp each to bring back his possessions and his body.

### LOUN STONES

Chief among Sladek’s possessions—and a big part of why his order wants those possessions returned—is his collection of six *loun stones*:

- Awareness (dark blue rhomboid): Wielder cannot be surprised
- Insight (incandescent blue sphere): Wisdom increases by 2
- Intellect (scarlet and blue sphere): Intelligence increases by 2
- Mastery (pale green prism): Proficiency bonus increases by 1
- Protection (dusty rose prism): Gain a +1 bonus to AC
- Reserve (vibrant purple prism): Store up to 3 levels of spells

See chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* for more information on *loun stones*.

When Sladek was pixelated, his *loun stones* were claimed by Vargo the skull lord. Saberhagen gives the characters three *spell scrolls* of *locate object* they can use to track the *loun stones* once they get to the island. When the characters use the scrolls, the position of the stones seems to shift as the skull lord moves around within the cube.

Naturally, if the characters do defeat Vargo and claim the *loun stones*, whether or not to return them for the reward is up to them.

### GETTING TO THE ISLAND

When the characters are ready to travel to the island, they can buy a ship, use their own ship if they have one already, or ask Saberhagen to hire a ship for

them. If they ask for sailors who can fight, the ship includes twenty **guards** (neutral mercenaries). The mercenaries take their orders from any character with the soldier background. In the absence of such a character, they follow the orders of the character with the highest Charisma.

### MAD MONODRONE

While the characters make their preparations for the journey to the Changing Island, a portside contact introduces them to an odd creature found by fishers in the waters off the island: a spherical, seemingly mechanical being with a single huge eye, and spindly wings and limbs. Any character with experience of planar travel recognizes the creature as a **monodrone**. Recognizing the creature otherwise requires a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

The only survivor of the modron strike force, the monodrone has lost its connection to Mechanus, and is now a rogue modron stranded on the Material Plane. It knows about the Archquadrone, the yugoloths, the battles that took place on the cube, and the effects of the Styx sea. It doesn’t know about Vargo, Avnas, or any of the recent visitors to the cube (including the drow, the balhannoth, and the shadar-kai).

How much of that information it can tell the characters is another matter, as the monodrone has a toddler’s intelligence and can speak only forty-eight words (see the table below). It cannot count above six, and describes any larger numbers as “six six” or “six six six.” Thankfully, its time on the Material Plane means that the creature has learned to speak those words in Common as well as Modron.

Bad	Good	Soft
Hard	Up	Down
One	Two	Three
Four	Five	Six
Go	Stay	Get
Drop	Give	Put
Boss	Break	Work
Near	Far	Circle
Life	Death	Point
Part	Whole	Lamp
Line	Face	Triangle
Square	Pentagon	Hexagon
Friend	Enemy	Fix
Ear	Resources	Department
Big	Small	Wet
Dry	Eye	Mouth

The monodrone’s mind is so alien that its thoughts cannot be read by magic, and it is immune to being charmed. But it is clearly panicked as it babbles about the “Six Face Bad,” “Bad Square,” and “Bad Boss.” The creature is terrified of the island and doesn’t want to return. However, its need to be part of an order inspires it to instinctively seek a new “boss,” and it quickly latches onto one of the characters in this role. The monodrone becomes a loyal companion and goes wherever its boss goes. However, once it gets to the



island, it is exposed to the pixelating curse just as the characters are, and might begin to transform.

The monodrone has no name, but it answers to a name given to it by its boss. This is the only word it can speak in addition to its base forty-eight words.

## JOURNEY TO THE ISLAND

Sailing for the mysterious Changing Island gives the characters their first glimpse of its mysteries—and its dangers.

### THE CHANGING ISLAND

As the characters come within sight of the island, roll a d6. This determines what face of the island is up when they approach, and what the characters see.

Five sides of the island-cube—**faces 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6**—feature a barren, rocky landscape of strangely geometrical terraces in various colors. These terraces are built up of square and rectangular lumps of gray, brown, black, and red stone or clay, though some areas glitter as if lumps of bronze are buried in the ground. The thick fog gives the surface an eerie, twilight look.

By contrast, **face 5** of the cube is a lush green jungle island of palm trees and banana plants. Here, sea waves crash against gentle, sandy beaches, and the fog that covers the island seems less oppressive. (In reality, dead bodies cover this face as they do all other faces of the cube, but they are transformed by the power of the creature that creates this delightful vista. See face 5 for more information.)

No matter which face is on the surface, the island is some 600 feet wide. Circumnavigating the island takes 10 minutes, and confirms that it is almost perfectly square except for a few rocky reefs (or sandbars, if face 5 is up) that jut out into the water at irregular intervals. In addition to the fog, rising hills (and trees if face 5 is up) make it impossible to see all the way across the island without going ashore.

Flying characters can travel above the island and see all of its current face from the air. However, any creature that lands on the island and takes off again is attacked by **vampiric mists** that lurk in the fog. See “Mysterious Fog,” below, and see *Mordenkainen’s Tome of Foes* for more information about the vampiric mist.

Characters who don’t want to risk contact with the black water surrounding the island can use teleportation magic to reach the island safely, and can use such magic on or within the cube. However, the cube’s infernal magic prevents creatures from leaving the island by the use of such magic without the permission of the cube’s ruler, Earl Andromalius—which permission cannot be granted, as Andromalius is dead.

While anywhere within the cube or within 30 feet of its exterior surfaces, a character who attempts to use any teleportation or planar travel magic (including the *plane shift* spell) to leave the cube realizes before the magic is used that it will not work. (A character who persists in trying to use such magic anyway expends its use or wastes a spell slot with no effect.) If the Heart Engine (see area 6.28) is destroyed, this effect ends.

Regardless of which face of the island is up when the characters approach, they also see a derelict drow galley floating several hundred feet away from it. If face 1 or face 2 is up, they see the ship of the ill-fated shadar-kai expedition as well. Countless other bits of timber and floating debris from scuttled ships float around the island, but none are big enough to conclusively identify.

### WHAT THE ISLAND TRULY IS

In its true form, the island is a cubical battle station from the plane of Acheron, floating in the Styx sea with only a small portion visible above the surface, like an iceberg. Its form is an iron cube 600 feet on a side, with one to six hatch-like entrances on each face of the cube. The visible face of the cube shows marks of battle: gouges, sections melted from intense heat, and indentations from battering blows. Each face has its own local gravity, though the characters will need to explore to learn this.

The stone terraces of the island are not an illusion. Rather, they are a magical transformation fueled by the pixelating curse. In truth, the surface of each face of the cube is covered with piles of pixelated dead—warriors of various humanoid species, many bearing weapons and armor. Held fast by the local gravity of each face, these are the soldiers of Acheron, including those who were killed by yugoloths when the cube was purged.

Any creature that has the truesight ability, is under the effect of a *true seeing* spell or similar magic, or wears *pixel glasses* (see the “New Magic Items” appendix) can see the island as it truly is. A *dispel magic* or *remove curse* spell also eliminates the pixelating curse from a 10-foot radius of its false surface for 10 minutes, revealing the true form of the pixelated dead. Those dead are piled to heights of 30 feet in some places, with intermittent valleys between those piles revealing the surface of the cube beneath them.

Characters who set foot on the island without seeing its true form have the disturbing experience of touching what looks like dirt and stone but is actually cubical metal, bone, and flesh. Thinking they are walking on rock or clay, they may not realize they are actually walking on pixelated bodies.

Countless dead cover the cube when the characters arrive, and more are shot out onto the surface every hour. Most are warriors who fell during the yugoloth assault, but the broken soul tap (area 6.14) has also caused a steady stream of new dead to appear inside the cube. Gathered by the pixelated hellfire engine at area 6.41, they are regularly expelled onto the surface of face 1, whereupon the bronze scouts of face 2 drag the bodies around in a futile attempt to inter them, which ultimately distributes them across the surface of the cube. (The hellfire engine and the bronze scout appear in *Mordenkainen’s Tome of Foes*.)

### THE PIXELATING CURSE

When any creature has been on the surface of the Changing Island for 10 minutes, and then each time it finishes a short or long rest while on or within the cube, it must attempt a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is infected with the



pixelating curse. Advantage on saving throws against magical effects applies, and chaotic creatures also have advantage on this save. Creatures that are immune to disease are immune to the curse.

The pixelating curse combines aspects of a traditional magical curse and a disease, and has both physical and mental components. If a creature is infected, the transmutation magic of the curse registers within them with a *detect magic* spell. The curse can be negated with a *cure disease*, *dispel magic*, *lesser restoration*, or *greater restoration* spell. Exposure to Styx water also ends the curse, including being fully immersed in the Styx sea or being doused by a bucket of Styx water. Once cured, though, a creature must leave the island within 10 minutes or make another Constitution save against becoming reinfected.

Once a creature has reached mental level 3 of the curse (see below), it no longer wants to be cured, and resists any attempts to cure it if it is conscious. To end the curse with one of the spells above, a spellcaster must succeed on an ability check using their spellcasting modifier, against a DC equal to 10 + the creature's Intelligence modifier. On a failed check, the creature remains pixelated and the spell is wasted.

The curse affects objects as well as living things. The effect on objects in a creature's possession is determined by the rate at which the creature is pixelating. Unattended objects (including things such as tents or gear left on the island while the characters explore) become pixelated within 1 hour. At your discretion, characters might need to attempt Wisdom (Perception) checks to recognize pixelated objects when they return to them. Magic items are not affected by the pixelating curse.

### PHYSICAL EFFECTS

A creature under the effect of the pixelating curse slowly transforms into a 'blocky' version of itself, becoming more pixelated with each level of the curse's progression. Once infected, a creature gains one additional physical level of the curse at the end of each short rest. It gains two additional physical levels of the curse at the end of each long rest.

- **Physical Level 1:** No outwardly visible effects.
- **Physical Level 2:** Each pixel is smaller than a grain of rice. The effect is subtle enough that others might not notice unless the creature under the curse's effect is touched or closely inspected. Otherwise, an observer notices the effect only with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.
- **Physical Level 3:** Each pixel is the size of a small pearl. The curse is clearly visible to all observers.
- **Physical Level 4:** Each pixel is the size of a grape.
- **Physical Level 5:** Each pixel is the size of a strawberry.
- **Physical Level 6:** Each pixel is the size of a small apple. Once a creature has taken 6 physical levels of the curse, it gains the pixelated template (see below).

When a creature is first infected by the pixelating curse, roll a d6. On an odd result, it becomes infected from the inside out instead of outside in. The creature

### NPCs AND THE CURSE

If the characters bring large numbers of mercenaries or other NPCs with them onto the island, you can choose to not roll saving throws for those characters. Rather, simply decide how the curse progresses through the ranks in whatever way seems most entertaining.

seems outwardly normal through the first 5 levels of the curse's physical progression, making it impossible to notice visually. However, if the creature is wounded by a piercing or slashing weapon, it bleeds red pixels of the appropriate size instead of blood.

### MENTAL EFFECTS

Pixelated creatures are all linked into a group mind that regulates their behavior. Upon becoming infected, and each time it gains another physical level of the curse, a creature must attempt a DC 16 Charisma saving throw. Chaotic creatures have advantage on this save. On a failure, the creature gains 1 mental level of the curse. Because progression through the mental levels of the curse depend on progression through the physical levels, it's possible for an infected creature to be fully physically transformed but still retain its self-identity, or to appear only partially pixelated but be totally under the curse's mental control.

- **Mental Level 1:** The creature rolls once on the Mental Pixelation table. Additionally, it begins to suffer from hallucinations. To the infected creature, pixelated creatures and objects start to appear normal, while uninfected creatures and objects begin to appear as melting, chaotic, shapeless forms. If some of the characters are infected and some are not, players might have fun roleplaying whose perspective is real.
- **Mental Level 2:** The creature rolls for a second effect on the Mental Pixelation table, in addition to the original effect. Reroll if the original effect is rolled again.
- **Mental Level 3:** The creature's mind completely succumbs to the curse. Its alignment changes to lawful neutral and it suffers all the effects of the Mental Pixelation table simultaneously. In the case of a conflict, higher-numbered effects supersede lower-numbered ones. The creature also refuses to acknowledge that it is cursed, and does not willingly allow its own curse to be removed or help others remove the curse on themselves.

A creature at mental level 3 of the curse begins receiving weak telepathic transmissions from other pixelated creatures. While within 120 feet of another pixelated creature, the first creature can fully understand the transmissions, and is informed that the Archquadrone is their god, and that the skull lord and the pixelated mage are its divinely appointed representatives.

### MENTAL PIXELATION

As noted on the Mental Pixelation table on the following page, the mental effects of the pixelating curse twist (or, rather, straighten) the cursed creature's mind toward absolute law. Though it retains its memories, the creature adopts lawful, conformist



behavior that supersedes its original personality. Players should be encouraged to roleplay cursed characters as stereotypical robots and “pod people,” as members of a fanatical cult, or as enthusiastic 1950s suburbanites.

Animals and other creatures of minimal intelligence that succumb to these effects might have them altered to better reflect instinct than intellect, as you determine.

### TEMPLATE: PIXELATED

A pixelated creature resembles a crude outline of its original form, composed of individual blocks about

### MENTAL PIXELATION

d10	Effect
1	The creature becomes obsessed with monetary value. At every opportunity, it must speculate on the cost in gold pieces of items that it, its companions, and its enemies are carrying.
2	The creature becomes obsessed with assessing weights. At every opportunity, it must speculate on the weight of items that it, its companions, and its enemies are carrying.
3	The creature becomes obsessed with measuring distances. At every opportunity, it must comment on the dimensions of objects, the range or reach of attacks, and so on.
4	The creature becomes obsessed with having a “normal” appearance. It sheds or stores away any unique garments and gear, trying to adopt the average look of most members of the party.
5	The creature becomes obsessed with its speech and mannerisms conforming to established norms. It loses any personal flourishes to its interactions with others, and might adopt the mannerisms of other characters in an attempt to blend in.
6	The creature becomes obsessed with logic and shuns emotional engagement. It focuses on the desire to work, the satisfaction of a job well done, and suspicion of others that look or think differently.
7	The creature develops a distaste of curved things, and avoids their use if possible (for example, stowing a bow or axe in order to attack with a sword).
8	The creature begins to hear happy voices promising a better way of life. (These are glimmers of the telepathy that all pixelated creatures share.)
9	The creature becomes obsessed with hierarchy and social authority. A character with the noble or soldier background might demand respect from allies and enemies. Other characters might speak respectfully of authority figures and become meek in their presence. (This mental effect culminates in the creature recognizing the skull lord as its master.)
10	The creature becomes a religious fanatic if it was already pious, or it becomes a militant atheist if not. When the creature meets the skull lord or sees the Archquadrone, it abandons its former faith (or lack thereof) to worship the Archquadrone as a god.

the size of a small apple. Pixelated creatures have their facial features (including eyes), fingers, toes, and teeth lost in the mass of blocks, although they retain their senses and their ability to eat, drink and speak. Pixelated creatures rarely talk, however, preferring to communicate with one another telepathically.

Pixelated natural attacks and weapons retain any ability to pierce and slash, even though they appear to be blunt and cubical.

Intelligent pixelated creatures seek out the skull lord and the Archquadrone, seeking to serve it as soldiers and stewards in an instinctive hierarchy. Animals and other creatures of minimal intelligence continue to behave normally, following their own instincts. But they defend any pixelated creature they see being attacked by an unpixelated one.

A pixelated creature has the following traits.

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- It is immune to the frightened condition.
- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

As with all creatures under the effect of the pixelating curse, being immersed in the Styx sea instantly changes a pixelated creature back to normal. A small splash of the black water causes a pixelated creature distress but has no other effect. Being doused by a full bucket of Styx water will cause one Medium or smaller creature to revert. Treat throwing a bucket of water as a weapon attack (range 5/15), with advantage if the bucket is wielded two-handed.

A Large or larger pixelated creature struck with a bucket of Styx water can attempt a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw to resist changing back. Such creatures require multiple buckets of Styx water to change back, as you determine.

### THE STYX SEA

As the characters draw closer, the first sign they see of their destination is a low bank of fog obscuring a small, flat island in the distance.

They then see the change in the water. The relatively clear, blue-green water of the sea meets a current of silty black liquid, which doesn’t mix with the seawater. The black water surrounds the island to a distance of a quarter mile on all sides. It is fresh water, although it has a strange smell reminiscent of alchemy and sweet perfume. Colder than the surrounding sea, it is also noticeably chilly to the touch.

A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check indicates that the water is more like river water than seawater. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Religion) check recognizes the water’s scent as similar to cassia (a spice that smells like cinnamon), natron (mineral salts), and bitumen (tar)—three ingredients that are used together in some cultures to mummify the dead. If the Intelligence (Religion) check result is 25 or higher, the character is reminded of old legends of the River Styx—the cold, dark river of the Lower Planes in which the memories of the dead are washed away.



The dark water surrounding the island is a transplanted portion of the River Styx, ritually summoned by the now-dead merrenoloth commander of the yugoloth strike team as a way to quarantine the island. The Styx sea is weaker than the pure River Styx, but it still radiates evil and magic. Small quantities of holy water poured upon it instantly turn to steam and evaporate.

A creature that is lightly splashed by or exposed to the water suffers no ill effects. But any creature other than a fiend, a construct, or a plant creature that is immersed in the water or that drinks it must attempt a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw. With a success, the creature feels a dark, sleepy sensation that threatens to pull its memories away but quickly fades. On a failed save, the creature's Intelligence and Charisma scores become 5 (if they were not already lower) and it loses all memories of its life. At the same time, all curses, diseases, and magical effects currently in effect upon the creature (including the pixelating curse) are ended.

A character who falls victim to the Styx sea's effects takes on the mentality of a young, meek child. They can speak haltingly, but they have total amnesia and cannot recognize their friends—and might even forget the function of common objects. If attacked, a victim's muscle memory kicks in and they are able to defend themselves with weapons. But a victim of the Styx sea cannot cast spells, concentrate on spells or other effects, use class features, employ magic items, or undertake any other complex action, at your determination.

A *greater restoration* spell restores a victim's ability scores and memory. Failing that, a victim's Intelligence and Charisma go up by 2 points at the end of each long rest, until their original scores are regained. As a victim regains its ability scores, it gradually regains its memories and features as well, with the amnesia ending when the creature's ability scores are restored to normal.

### INVISIBLE GUARDIANS

Three **hydroloths**<sup>SM</sup> lurk invisibly in the Styx sea, guarding the island so that no creatures leave it that might spread the **pixelating curse**. Any character who succeeds on a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check while scanning the black water can see the telltale ripples of large shapes moving therein. If the check result is 25 or higher, the observer makes out three invisible shapes that are human-sized and that swim more like giant frogs than fish—and that slowly move to intercept the characters' ship.

The hydroloths were ordered to guard the island by their commanders—the oinoloth and the late merrenoloth that went onto face 5 of the cube with a force of other hydroloths and never returned. They know that the oinoloth must still be alive because they've seen the vampiric mists drifting through the fog that covers the island (see the *censer of blood* in the "New Magic Items" appendix). However, they have no idea as to the other yugoloths' fate.

If a ship observes the island from a distance, the hydroloths watch but leave it alone. Only if a ship



makes a close approach or a creature flies or teleports from the ship to the island do they react, attempting to scuttle the ship if it touches the island, or boarding it, killing the crew, and leaving it adrift if it doesn't. The hydroloths won't pursue creatures onto the cube. They know from experience that touching the cube for a short period probably won't pixelate them, but they're scared to risk it.

If the characters don't flee at once, the hydroloths use their telepathy to communicate with them, recognizing that powerful adventurers might be of use to them. The fiends can explain the fog (see below), the pixelating curse, the Styx sea, and the outer workings of the island—in exchange for a promise that the characters will try to locate and aid any surviving yugoloths currently within the cube.

The hydroloths make whatever slippery promises they can in an attempt to win the characters' assistance, though they have no intention of keeping those promises. However, they can share other useful intelligence, including that the yugoloth strike team went ashore on the beautiful island (face 5), and that the fiends carried a number of valuable magic items the characters are welcome to if their owners have met their end. (They don't bother telling the characters that the oinoloth will ultimately claim all such treasures for itself, killing the characters once the rescue is done.)

### DERELICT DROW GALLEY

Not far from the island, an abandoned drow galley—a black and lavender trireme once rowed by chained slaves—floats aimlessly through the fog. The ship is built on four levels: the main deck (exposed to the weather), the cannon deck (where the main cabins are located), the rowers' deck, and the cargo hold. Its three banks of oars suggest that the huge ship should have a crew of over one hundred. But there is no sign of motion



on the deck, the sails are torn, and numerous oars have been shattered.

Characters who approach to within 30 feet of the ship become suddenly aware of the telepathic presence of other creatures. Three entities contact three individual characters, crying out in rage as they demand to be freed from something. The characters can respond to the pleas, but the nature of telepathic communications gives them no hint that these creatures are three *bulezau* demons. Likewise, the demons keep that information to themselves as they plead for the characters' aid. The *bulezaus* are imprisoned in a magic pentagram in a cabin on the ship's cannon deck. See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for details of the *bulezau*.

### FATE OF THE DROW

The ship was captained by a drow named Simak, who used the advice of a drow oracle to seek out a "great weapon" that had fallen to the Material Plane from Acheron. After determining the dangers of the Styx sea when one crew member lost his memory after being exposed to the black water, a drow force went ashore on face 4 of the island under command of Simak and a high priestess, leaving guards and galley slaves behind.

The landing party were all promptly killed or captured by the skull lord's forces. Vargo tried to take the high priestess's skull, but failed when she killed herself first. Meanwhile, the drow forces and galley slaves on the ship were killed by the hydroloths. Simak, the last survivor of the drow expedition, escaped death at Vargo's hands by pretending to be under the effects of the Styx sea, and now lives in the complex under face 6, desperately plotting her escape.

### MAIN DECK

This deck holds the ship's two masts, a small empty forecabin and aftcabin, and three sets of stairs leading down open hatches into the decks below. The whole deck is strewn with the gory remnants of a battle: bloodstains (drow, killed by the hydroloths), scattered weapons, some stained with a foul ichor (the hydroloths' blood), and piles of mingled hydroloth vomit and drow bones. A close investigation discerns the bodies of ten to twenty individual drow. The prints of huge frog-like creatures (the hydroloths) cover the deck.

Between the central hatch and the starboard rail, the ship's fungus-wood timbers are damaged and streaked with foul-smelling slime. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check determines that some large creature crawled out of the hatch and went overboard. (This was the *balhannoth*, currently on face 5 of the cube).

The *bulezaus'* telepathy has a range of 60 feet, and can be heard from anywhere on the ship.

### CANNON DECK

The cannon deck consists of a set of cabins to aft and a large open area containing sixteen cannons (see "Siege Equipment" in chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). The iron cannons are carved with spiders, demons, and gargoyles.

In the aft cannon deck, beyond a short corridor, are the cabins of the captain, the first mate, and the high

priestess of Lolth. One wall of the corridor features what appears to be a thick growth of fungus. In truth, this is an *alkilith* demon grown from spores released when the ship was abandoned. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for details of the *alkilith*.)

**Fiendish Ambush.** The *alkilith* resembles a fungal growth eating into the wood of the ship. It is visually indistinguishable from a slime or fungus, but its fiendish nature can be noted with a *detect evil and good* spell or similar ability, and it responds if attacked. If its true nature is not revealed, the *alkilith* waits for the characters to get close so that its Foment Madness can confuse at least one of them. It then attacks at will.

**First Mate's Cabin.** These utilitarian sailor's quarters contain nothing of value.

**High Priestess's Cabin.** A rotten stench is noticed by anyone approaching the door to this area. The finely furnished room is decorated with black and red spider-silk tapestries (1,000 gp). On the floor is a large chalk pentagram in which three hungry *bulezaus*<sup>M</sup> are imprisoned.

Summoned just before the drow went to the island—then forgotten here when the ship was attacked by the hydroloths—the *bulezaus* cannot escape unless the chalk pentagram is broken from outside. When they see the characters, their telepathic demands for aid become more agitated. The demons make any promises to secure their escape, but they immediately break those oaths and try to eat their rescuers if freed. Any character proficient in the Arcana skill knows that attacking the *bulezaus* from outside the pentagram will break its magic and release them.

Even if the pentagram isn't broken, the characters are still subject to the *bulezaus'* Rotting Presence feature. It takes 5 rounds under the effects of Rotting Presence to fully search the cabin for the treasure found here—a pouch holding thirty-two bloodstone, onyx, and sardonyx gems (50 gp each); various ritual devices and candles (100 gp); a *+3 dagger*; and a *cloak of the bat*.

**Captain's Cabin.** Decorated in white and cream puffball colors with coral-like fungus candelabra, this area contains the ship's charts and the captain's log (written in Elvish). The charts show that the ship originated in the Underdark, traveling to the sea by way of secret underground rivers. They are worth 500 gp to a sage or a well-heeled Underdark explorer.

The log identifies the ship's commander as Simak, the head of a minor drow noble house. Two weeks earlier, a drow oracle told her that a great weapon had fallen out of Acheron, crashing from the Nine Hells to the Material Plane. The weapon is described as a giant battle station—a flying fortress of immense power with cannons that can destroy cities. Simak quickly gathered a secret expedition to find this weapon, seeking to increase the glory of her house. The last entry in the log identifies this mysterious weapon as the island, confirming that it had been sighted, and that the crew were planning to go ashore.

The cabin also contains a *+1 shortsword*, a *potion of vitality*, 800 gp, and a collection of fine spider-shell dishware worth 1,200 gp.



## ROWER'S DECK

The bodies of over a hundred unfortunate human, kuo-toa, and myconid galley slaves are still chained to rows of filthy benches, where they were killed by the hydroloths. Near the central hatch, the bodies have been dismembered in gruesome and imaginative ways. Toward the edges of the fray, they are each killed with a single blow to the head or chest, as if whoever massacred them began to grow bored.

## CARGO HOLD

A rank smell fills this area, and can be noted by characters as they descend the stairs. The hold contains barrels of food, fresh water, and fungus wine, along with nonmagical weapons and armor, rope, sailcloth, glowing fungus lamps, and other supplies.

In the center of the hold is a great 10-foot-by-10-foot iron cage, empty and seemingly melted open. Foul-smelling lavender slime sticks to the bars of the cage, and drips along a trail of damaged floorboards leading to the stairs below the main hatch. Iron amulets bearing the mark of Lolth are bolted to the sides of the cage. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes them as wards against transmutation, though their magic has failed. The cage once contained Simak's 'pet'—a balhannoth that escaped to the island after the rest of the crew was killed, and which now lairs on face 5.

## EXPLORING THE ISLAND

If the characters drop a line or an anchor to test the depth of the water near the island, they don't find bottom. The island seems to rise vertically out of the depths like a plateau, giving no sign that it's floating. Its edges are like a short cliff that rises out of the water, but any character who inspects the edge or has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher notes something disturbing.

Where the dark waves crash against the cliff, an irregularity appears in the stone, with the rectangular terraces seeming to break down into something like mangrove roots or coral. Getting close enough for a careful inspection reveals what those 'roots' truly are—uncountable close-stacked bodies that are piled over one another as they disappear into the black depths.

This grotesque vision appears because the black Styx water dispels the pixelating curse. Where the upper surface of the cube is exposed to air, it is pixelated. Where the other faces are under the Styx sea, they return to their original form of iron covered by the fallen dead.

## RANDOM ISLAND MISHAPS

All the ground on the island is difficult terrain. For each 10 minutes that a character spends walking around, they must make a successful DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, roll a d6 to determine the outcome.

**1—Spikey Step.** The character impales their foot on something that looks like a three-foot-long spike of shining gray shale, which deals 3 (1d6) piercing damage and breaks away from the ground. The spike is a longsword. Close examination shows that despite

appearing to be made of cubes, the spike's tip and sides are extremely sharp.

**2—Unexpected Fall.** The character falls down a previously unseen hole and is trapped by something that feels like thick roots. With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, the character realizes that the roots are the cold, clammy arms and legs of the dead. The character is restrained, but can escape or be lifted out with a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check.

**3—Slippery Slope.** A chunk of hillside collapses under the character, who falls prone and takes 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage. The ground breaks apart into six-foot-long, log-like chunks—a number of bodies that roll downhill before coming to a stop.

**4—Cubed Loot.** The character trips across a gray metallic object that separates itself from the ground and can be picked up. If the characters wash the object in the Styx sea or see it through *pixel glasses* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix), roll a d6 to see what it is:

d6	Object
1	A silver bracelet worth 75 gp
2	A small platinum idol of Bhaal worth 300 gp
3	A silver-plated githyanki hand worth 200 gp, and which can be used to open the locks of the doors into and inside the cube (see "Exterior Doors")
4	A silver medallion worth 125 gp
5	A figurine of wondrous power—silver raven
6	A cursed amulet resembling a medusa's face. The amulet petrifies any creature within 30 feet of it that looks at it, as if the creature were targeted by a <i>flesh to stone</i> spell (save DC 15). The amulet has AC 15 and 10 hit points. If it is broken, any creatures it has petrified or restrained have those conditions ended.

**5—Foul Slime.** The character steps into something soft, releasing black pixelated slime and a foul smell. The character and all other creatures within 10 feet of them must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute or until they intentionally vomit as an action.

**6—Armor Pile.** A character slips on an area of metallic gray cubes, rectangles, and tubes (a pile of weapons and armor stripped from the dead). The character falls prone and takes 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

## MYSTERIOUS FOG

The eerie fog that surrounds the island rises 100 feet above the water and extends 1,000 feet across. The area of the fog is lightly obscured, and it has a red tinge in places. Creatures that suffer negative effects in sunlight ignore those effects on the surface of the island while the fog is present.

A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check confirms that the fog is supernatural in origin, though it creates no ill effects. But the fog hides a deadly threat in the form of the red-tinged areas within it, which manifest in response to any creature that first sets foot on the island, then flies while on its surface. The first creature to do so is attacked by seven **vampiric mists**<sup>M</sup> created by the oinoloth's *censer of blood* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix). One mist attacks the first



round, followed by two the second round, and four on the third round until all the mists are engaged.

The oinoloth's orders to the mists were to destroy any creature that tries to fly away from the island. If a flying creature returns to the surface, the vampiric mists stop attacking, hovering above the creature for a few moments before returning to the fog.

If any of the vampiric mists are destroyed, they don't refresh. Only the *censer of blood* can create more.

A flying character who explores near the center of the fog notices that it appears to thicken at that center, congealing into a strange, disc-like black shape roughly 6 feet in diameter, hanging 50 feet above the island. The disc feels soft to the touch and can be grabbed. A strong yank pulls it out of the air and into the character's hands, causing the fog to instantly dissipate. If this happens by day, sunlight shines upon the island, causing the deaths of any remaining vampiric mists within 3 rounds. The disc is the *handkerchief of darkness* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix).

### BODIES REVEALED

The actions of the skull lord and other creatures within the floating cube cause it to periodically rotate, exposing new faces of the island while dunking others. When this happens, the freshly exposed face initially appears covered with the dead. But as the Styx water that soaks the bodies evaporates, the curse seeps out of the cube to gradually transform the dead into the pixelated terraces. The full conversion takes about 4 hours, during which time the in-transition terraces slowly lose the appearance of the bodies they truly are.

While fully under the effect of the curse, the features of the bodies can't be discerned, but they retain their true texture—bronze, iron, bone, and flesh, reshaped into perfect cubes. Walking over the island is an awkward and disturbing task, as the 'ground' slips around in large discrete chunks (bodies tumbling about) and randomly changes texture from hard and metallic to soft and squishy.

Submerging the bodies or their gear in the Styx sea unpixelates them. But unless they are immediately removed from the island, the dead quickly become reinfected, showing signs of pixelation within 10 minutes and becoming completely repixelated within 1 hour.

The bodies show no signs of being nibbled by fish (which are repelled by the Styx sea) or gulls (which have been attacked by the vampiric mists and now give the island a wide berth). Though the dead are uniformly gray and cold, they are not currently rotting, as the Styx sea both preserves them and covers up their smell. A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check allows a character to sniff out the cloaked smell of slow decay.

### SEARCHING THE BODIES

Searching the bodies is effectively impossible when they are pixelated. Unless a character is completely pixelated or wearing *pixel glasses*, the bodies are a mosaic of rock, metal, and cold squishy substances with occasional detachable metallic cubes or rectangles.

The bodies can be easily searched while submerged (though doing so brings characters into contact with the Styx sea), or when they have freshly risen from the water. Once exposed to the air, a body repixelates slowly over 4 hours.

The majority of the bodies are human, though occasional duergar, gnomes, dragonborn, and hobgoblins are found among them. All are adults, and represent countless peoples and cultures (including many from remote portions of the multiverse, which the characters won't recognize). Most are naked, while others bear weapons and wear the armor of foot soldiers. With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Medicine) check, a character discerns that though the armored bodies show signs of having died in battle, the naked bodies appear to have died from massive blunt trauma such as a high fall. Moreover, the bodies that have died from falling have not been dead as long as the warriors—including many bodies that look fresh.

If the characters want to search the bodies for valuables, let each character attempt a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. On a success, the character finds some object of value, as you determine.

If the characters use *speak with dead* to talk to any of the bodies, what they learn depends on whether they interrogate a naked or armored body. The armored warriors remember being soldiers of Acheron, serving in Cube 1717 under Earl Andromalius, and then being overwhelmed by the pixelating curse and killed by yugoloths. The naked dead have no memories other than appearing in the soul tap in area 6.14 and falling to their deaths.

### A FAMILIAR FACE

If the characters search the bodies long enough, have one character notice a disturbingly familiar body: an exact duplicate of an evil enemy the party fought and killed in the past. The dead enemy is recognizable by their facial features, but is wearing new armor and wielding new weapons. Any death wounds the characters remember having dealt to the enemy are gone, with new fatal wounds taking their place.

This fallen warrior is the same enemy the characters killed, reborn in Acheron after death to fight eternal battles for the lords of that plane. Caught in the pixelating curse, the villain then died again in the battle with the yugoloths.

### RANDOM SURFACE ENCOUNTERS

Each time the characters arrive on a new face of the cube (including when they first come to the island), each time they finish a short or long rest on the surface of the island, or whenever they spend 1 hour or more exploring the surface, roll a d6. On a roll of 1, use the table below to determine what the characters encounter. All these creatures appear in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*.

If the characters are on face 5, ignore all results except 1 or 2. The cadaver collector is strong enough to pass across that face without fear of its residents, and the berbalang has authority over those residents. The other creatures of the cube avoid the beautiful island.



d6	Encounter
1–2	1 <b>cadaver collector</b>
3	1 <b>berbalang</b>
4	1 <b>derro savant</b> and 1 <b>gray render</b>
5	1d3 + 1 <b>white abishai</b>
6	1d4 + 2 <b>bronze scouts</b>

**Cadaver Collector.** Having survived the fall from Acheron, a **cadaver collector**<sup>M</sup> now roams the surface of the cube looking for victims. Unaffected by the Styx sea, this deadly construct emerges from the water to look for prey, then reenters the water after crossing the upper face of the cube. Constantly passing through the water has left the cadaver collector and its load of bodies unpixelated, though it might gather pixelated dead to add to its collection while the characters watch. It attacks any creatures on the cube's surface, but won't pursue prey through the doors.

**Berbalang.** Bunch the **berbalang**<sup>M</sup> (unpixelated; see area 6.13) goes to the surface to scavenge skulls and bones. It ignores the characters unless forced to talk to them, and runs for the nearest door if attacked.

**Derro Savant and Gray Render.** Avnas the **derro savant**<sup>M</sup> and her faithful pixelated **gray render**<sup>M</sup>, Moxon, are searching the dead for magic and trinkets she might use in her work. See area 6.17 for more information.

**White Abishai.** This group is on an expedition from the temple of Tiamat (area 6.38), looking for a way off the island or for potential sacrifices. The **white abishai**<sup>M</sup> attempt to capture the characters' ship if they can, or to knock the characters unconscious and drag them back to be sacrificed to their goddess.

**Bronze Scouts.** The **bronze scouts**<sup>M</sup> from face 2 wander over and around the unfortunate dead, attempting to lay them to rest according to their programming, but stymied by their sheer numbers. They approach to within 5 feet of the characters to inspect them, but do not attack unless attacked first. Roll a d6 each time the bronze scouts appear. On 1–3, they are pixelated. On 4–6, they are unpixelated, having just emerged from one of the cube faces presently underwater.

## PERMANENT LOSSES

If the **berbalang**, the **derro**, the **gray render**, or any **abishai** are permanently killed, remove them from their home locations. The **cadaver collector** has no permanent home, but is also not replaced if destroyed. Only the **bronze scouts** can reappear indefinitely.

## WHEN THE CUBE ROLLS

In addition to the chance for random encounters, whenever the characters finish a short or long rest on the surface of the island or spend 1 hour or more there, have one player roll a d20. On a 10 or less, the cube suddenly begins to move as if roiled by an earthquake. Its current face tilts down into the water along one edge, and a new face rises above the surface, ascending hundreds of feet into the air before plunging down in an enormous spray of water. Roll a d6 to determine which face comes up, ignoring the current face.

Avoiding being dunked into the Styx sea is most easily accomplished by quickly moving to and opening a door into the cube, by flying (though characters doing so will be attacked by the vampiric mists), or by running toward the rising face as the cube turns. Characters who run along the tilting cube discover that each face of the cube has its own gravity. Even when a face is tilted nearly 90 degrees in the moments before it plunges into the water, creatures can move along its surface as if it were level ground. However, the violent motion of the twisting cube can easily toss creatures into the water.

Each creature running across the tilting cube must make three DC 15 Strength (Athletics) checks. A creature that succeeds on at least two checks reaches the next face safely, while all creatures that fail two checks are plunged into the water. A creature that ignores difficult terrain or whose speed is greater than 30 feet has advantage on all three checks.

When a new face of the cube is exposed, the formerly submerged side remains temporarily affected by the curse-removing effects of the Styx sea, letting the characters see the surface of the cube in its true form: a vast expanse of waterlogged bodies. The dead repixelate over the next four hours, giving the characters time to easily inspect them if they choose to.

If the characters watch the island for long enough from their vessel, they might also see the cube roll. Ask one player for a d20 roll whenever the characters finish a long or short rest within view of the island, with the cube rolling on a 10 or less. Though the cube's movement sends waves crashing against nearby ships, characters on those ships are in no danger.

## EXPLORING THE CUBE UNDERWATER

Even creatures that can breathe underwater have a difficult time exploring the island's submerged areas, because of the mind-wiping effect of the Styx sea. A submerged creature continually feels the dark power of the water, and must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw every minute or suffer its mind-wiping effects.

Underneath the water, the 'landscape' of the cube appears in its true form of iron piled high with the bodies of the dead. A spell such as *Otiluke's resilient sphere* or a magic item such as the *apparatus of Kwalish* can allow the characters to explore the water more easily. However, visibility in the murky Styx sea is limited to 10 feet in any direction.

Even for characters who succeed on their saves or can explore under the water safely, the invisible hydrolaths that guard the island are a deadly threat. Those fiends follow, attack, and kill any creatures in the water unless their attention is distracted by something happening elsewhere.

Any creature that swims within 40 feet of one of the cube's underwater faces feels a momentary dizzy sensation as it's pulled 'down' by the submerged face's local gravity. A creature can easily swim away from the cube's surface (the effect is no stronger than normal gravity), though doing so is mildly disorienting.

The cube's doors won't open on any face that is submerged, and most inhabitants of the cube retreat



inside when the face they normally dwell on is underwater. The only exceptions are the corpse flower of face 4, the bronze scouts and other constructs of face 2, and the cadaver collector that roams all the faces of the cube (see “Random Encounters”). These creatures are unaffected by the Styx sea, and can be encountered by characters exploring under the water.

## CUBE 1717

Built as a floating iron fortress in the planar war-world of Acheron, the cube is filled with machinery whose complexity rivals the biology of any living creature. Like a parasite, the Archquadrone plugged itself into the center of that machinery, and the entire cube is now infected by the pixelating curse still pumping from the construct’s heart. The cube cannot operate at full capacity until its ‘brain’ has been fully engaged by the Six-Face Throne. But its autonomic functions still control the internal gravity, the opening and shutting of doors, and the cleanup system that has been disgorging bodies onto the outside of the cube.

If damaged, the cube can heal itself as long as its ‘heart’ beats, slowly generating new, pixelated metal to replace that which was destroyed.

## EXTERIOR DOORS

At various points on each face of the cube (except for face 1), a number of metal doors lead into the interior. When the cube is submerged or has freshly risen from the water, these doors appear as 20-foot-wide, 6-inch thick circular metal hatches. At four cardinal points just outside the edge of the door, smaller 1-foot-wide circles are covered with symbolic patterns of law and set with the indentation of a handprint.

The circles radiate abjuration to a *detect magic* spell. If a lawful creature presses its hand into any indentation, the door irises open with a whoosh, revealing a 20-foot-wide shaft with four ladders (one beneath each handprint) leading down. Nonlawful creatures can use the hand of a dead lawful creature (including any of the creatures on the surface) to open the door.

When the characters first come to the island—and within 10 minutes of a cube face emerging from the water—the doors are pixelated. Though the circles are still recognizable, the symbols of law and the handprint appear as boxy, illegible mosaics. While a door is in this form, it opens only when the flesh of a lawful creature is pressed into the door in a cubical shape. Any creatures or bodies on the surface have their hands automatically conform to a cubical shape when they are pixelated. Alternatively, the characters can press, flense, or *polymorph* the flesh of a lawful creature so that it fits the shape.

A *remove curse* or *dispel magic* spell cast upon a pixelated circle causes it to become unpixelated for 10 minutes, allowing it to be used with a normal handprint.

Near the top of each of the four ladders, a pixelated handprint lock operates the door from the other side. The interior of each shaft is lit by glowing pixels in the walls at regular intervals. Like the doors, the shafts are

circular, but show pixelated edges made of numerous tiny cubes. The rungs of the ladders are also square.

When any character passes through the doors—or 10 seconds after opening a door if no character does—square pixel lights in the shaft walls near the doors flash red, a hidden alarm blares, and the doors seal shut. If a lawful creature’s body blocks the door, the door stays open and the red lights continue flashing until the creature moves. The doors close around the body of any other creature, which must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw to leap out of the way or take 35 (10d6) slashing damage as the door irises closed on them. A creature reduced to 0 hit points by this damage dies as the door cuts it in two. A creature not killed by the door chooses which side of the door it ends up on.

The doors have AC 20; 100 hit points; a damage threshold of 7; immunity to psychic and poison damage; immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage from nonmagical attacks not made with adamantite weapons; and resistance to cold and fire damage. The first 20 damage dealt to a door opens a small hole in it, just wide enough to let a character look through. Anyone dealing bludgeoning, piercing, slashing, or thunder damage to the doors makes noise that echoes deep into the cube, alerting any nearby guards. As long as the Six-Face Throne is active, damaged or destroyed doors slowly regenerate, returning to their original condition in 1 hour.

## JUNCTION ROOMS

By default, each face of the cube has its own local gravity, which is controlled from area 6.28 and extends 40 feet above and below each face. When characters descend deeper into the cube, the gravity from face 6 (the dominant face) takes over. This change in gravity is potentially disorienting—and can be deadly in certain areas.

Several doors on the cube’s surface lead to junction rooms that allow travel from one face to another. Some junctions lead to two faces, while others lead to three. A character who flies, climbs, or falls down the 40-foot shaft to the ‘bottom’ of the junction room lands in what seems to be the bottom of a 20-foot-wide well-like space, which features two or three identical 20-foot-wide shafts leading up. Each shaft has ladders on its four sides, like most of the corridors inside the cube.

The special gravity of the cube combines with illusion magic to make the ‘floor’ of each junction room appear to be down. All the shafts leading out seem to lead up, even though the different shafts lead to different cube faces that are perpendicular to one another. This odd effect causes all nonpixelated creatures to have disadvantage on attack rolls while in a junction room.

## MOVING THE CUBE

Characters who climb down one shaft into the junction room, then climb up another shaft leading onto a different face find themselves under one of the exterior doors, with four pixelated handprint circles controlling the door from the inside. However, if any of these circles are activated, the opening of the door is delayed by



nearly half a minute while red lights beep and a faint shaking is felt—a sign that the cube is rotating.

Any attempt to open a door currently underwater causes the cube to move in this way, putting the face the characters are trying to exit onto above the surface, and preventing water from pouring in when the door is opened. Many of the seemingly random rotations of the cube are caused by creatures traveling between faces in this way.

If one group of characters goes inside a junction room and travels to a new face while other characters are on the surface, those characters outside need to deal with the cube's movement (see "When the Cube Rolls"). If different groups of characters or NPCs try to operate different underwater doors at the same time, an alarm blares and the cube doesn't move. Likewise, if a face about to go underwater has a door opened on it, the cube temporarily ceases its movement and alarms go off. The skull lord Vargo and other creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne can override such conflicts to open and close any door they choose and orient the cube accordingly—even to the extent of forcing doors to close on lawful creatures.

Characters who step out through a door that has just emerged above the water see that face of the island covered with wet, unpixelated bodies just emerged from the sea (unless they're on face 5 and the balhannoth is alive). If the face of the cube they left most recently was also unpixelated, characters might assume that they've returned to that face, with no visible landmarks except hills of bodies, the drow ship in the distance, and the sea stretching to the horizon.

## INTERIOR DOORS AND GRAVITY SWITCHES

Several exterior doors lead deeper into the interior of the cube, as noted in their descriptions. These entrances are notable for having a second door, identical to the exterior door, 40 feet along the shaft. The double doors are an extra level of defense to protect the cube's vital interior. They can be opened like the exterior doors, and regenerate in the same way if damaged or destroyed.

Beyond each interior door, the 20-foot-wide shaft continues on into the depths of Cube 1717. However, beyond the 40-foot point marking the interior door, the local gravity of the nearest face is canceled out by the gravity of face 6. Characters moving down these shafts feel the strange sensation of gravity swiftly changing, so that a character climbing down a ladder on a wall will suddenly be crawling backward along a floor. Once they adjust to the new gravity, characters can stand and walk in the shaft as they explore the interior of the cube.

Characters in the interior under face 6 who move toward many of the doors on other faces have the reverse experience. Over the space of a few steps, it suddenly becomes harder and harder to walk forward, until the characters must crouch down and climb along the ladder as the floor becomes a wall.

These shifts in gravity are disorienting but harmless. However, two places in the cube transform this gravity switch into a potentially deadly trap. All the inhabitants

of the cube know about these areas and how to safely move through them. See area 4.3 and area 5.2 for more information.

## FEATURES OF THE CUBE

All the interior spaces of the cube are pixelated except for areas 6.17 and 6.18 (Avnas's rooms), area 6.22 (the surgery), area 6.23 (the laboratory), area 6.29 (the library), area 6.31 (Vargo's chamber), and area 6.38 (the temple of Tiamat). The characters might be able to see unpixelated versions of other rooms, either by using *pixel glasses* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix), or by using *dispel magic*, *remove curse*, or Styx water to temporarily unpixelate part of the room.

Before it was pixelated, the interior of the cube had an austere, fortress-like look, punctuated by ornate devilish imagery. Pixelation has simplified that look to an even harsher, more barren appearance. Unless otherwise specified, all interior corridors and rooms are dimly lit by white or red pixel panels, set into the walls at 30-foot intervals. The main corridors and shafts running between rooms are 20 feet wide, while some smaller corridors are 10 feet wide. Most corridors are perfectly square or rectangular, while the shafts are circular with pixelated edges. The risk of gravitational shifts means that corridors and rooms feature emergency ladders or rungs set into grooves running along floors, ceilings, and walls.

**Noisy Passage.** Unless the characters take care to use stealth, any movement through the cube sets footsteps echoing loudly off its iron floors and walls, alerting creatures in adjacent rooms. Likewise, the characters receive advance warning of any nonstealthy creatures approaching.

**Damage and Destruction.** Many parts of the cube's interior (particularly areas 6.14, 6.32, and 6.39) retain damage from the battle with the yugoloths that sent the cube to the Material Plane. Some rooms have been completely destroyed and are inaccessible, but characters who return to these damaged places over the course of a few hours notice that the metal in those areas is slowly regenerating. If the Heart Engine (see area 6.28) remains active, the cube completely heals itself in time, and the damaged rooms reappear.

## FACE 1: EXHAUST PORT

This face is the bottom of the ship in its normal orientation, with face 6 on the top. It is the only face that has no doors leading to junction rooms and other faces. Instead, the only way in or out of the face is its central shaft.

When the characters first survey face 1, they see gray steam rising from a crater in the distance, mixing with the fog as strange chemical compounds evaporate from the pool at area 1.1.

### AREA 1.1: CENTRAL SHAFT

Within a rough-walled crater rising at the center of face 1, a 40-foot-wide circular shaft drops 30 feet into a pool of murky, steaming water. An oily substance clings to the pool's surface in glinting squares, like fish scales.



The sides of the shaft resemble blackened iron and are slick, such that climbing up or down without using a rope requires a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. A character who tests or enters the murky black water finds it the temperature of a warm bath, and notes that it smells like cassia (or cinnamon), oil, and tar. The oily substance is pixelated, and crystallizes in pixel-like masses on the skin and clothes of characters in the water. These encrustations are harmless and can be brushed off. (The water was originally from the Styx sea, but the exceptionally powerful pixelating curse within the shaft has dispelled its powers and turned it into normal water.)

**Exhaust Port Pool.** A character who tries to swim to the bottom of the black pool feels a strange dizzying sensation when they are 10 feet under the surface. If they continue to dive, they pass through a layer of floating debris—most of it pixelated body parts—then find themselves suddenly swimming upward. Characters emerge from the other side of the pool at the bottom of area 6.47—a slimy, air-filled, 200-foot-long shaft dimly lit by red lights high above.

Passing through the pool this way involves a gravity flip into the dominant gravity of face 6, so that the character's former 'up' is now 'down.' The full depth of the pool is 20 feet—10 feet on either side of the debris wall that marks where the gravity switches. A magical pressure barrier beneath face 6 keeps water from entering the cube this way when face 1 is submerged.

This shaft is the exhaust port for Cube 1717. Every hour on the hour, the cube expels garbage and bodies through the shaft, dropping it from area 6.47 and then forcing it out of area 1.1 in an explosive geyser of cubic debris. During the characters' first time on face 1, roll a d6 every 10 minutes. On a 1, the cube shoots up a geyser, spraying the area around area 1.1 with piles of pixelated dead. The same geyser then erupts every hour thereafter.

### AREA 1.2: JUVENILE CORPSE FLOWERS

A mat of strange, fleshy green plants with purple buds, each about six inches high, grows here upon the mosaic-like 'rock' of the island. The plants completely cover the surface down to the cube's edge, where they disappear

under the water. The plants are unpixelated, and have a smell like rotten flesh.

The mat of vegetation is a mass of immature corpse flowers (from *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*), growing from the main mass at area 4.5. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature or Arcana) check identifies these plant creatures. Immune to the Styx sea, the corpse flowers are growing rapidly, though this patch is harmless. A character who uproots a portion of the patch sees it is growing from the bodies underneath. The Styx water traveling through the plants' roots unpixelates the bodies on the surface, which blend seamlessly into the cubical, pixelated bodies outside the roots' range.

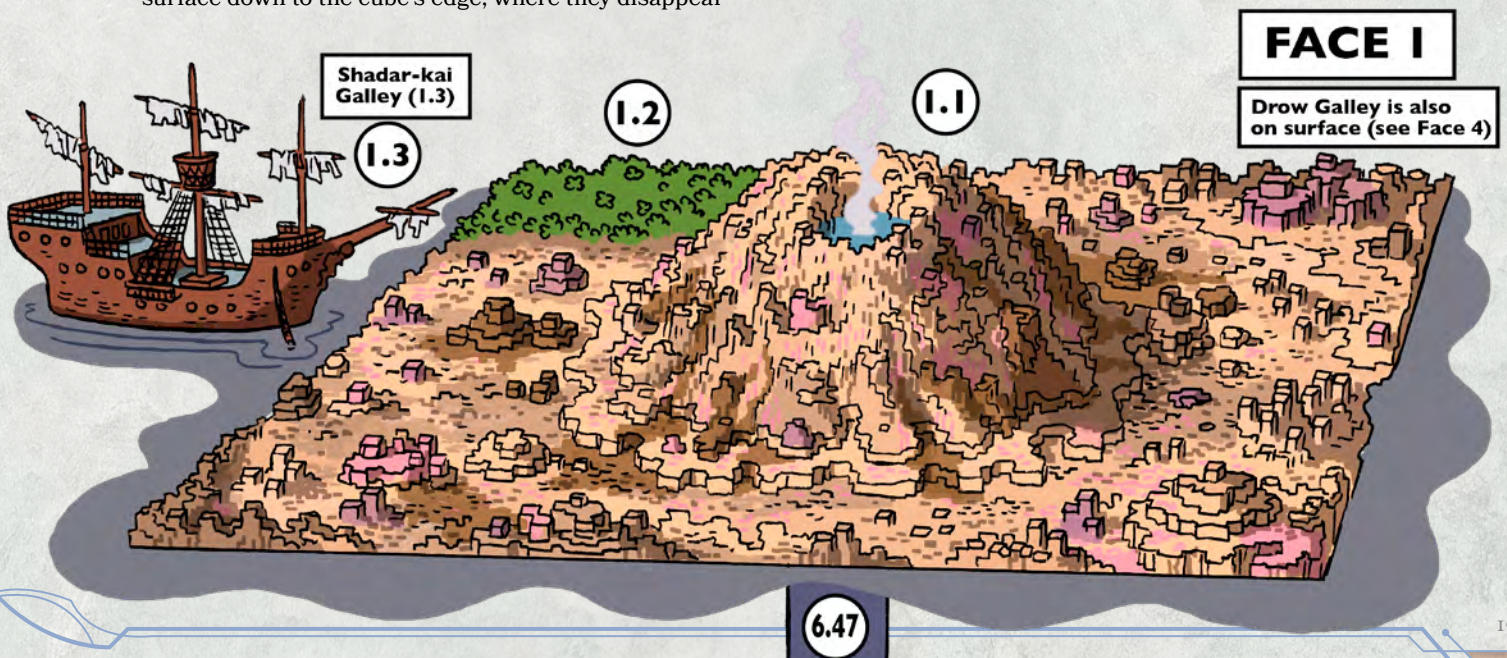
### AREA 1.3: SHADAR-KAI CARAVEL

When face 1 is up, a strange ship floats on the waves 50 feet from the edge of the island. This caravel is gray and white, and decorated with white carvings of autumn leaves. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (History) check identifies the style as suggestive of the mysterious shadar-kai. The ship is badly battered, its sails are missing, and it floats low on the waterline. Its anchor is dropped (and stuck in face 2).

The interior of the caravel is thoroughly wet but still relatively intact. Anything of value on board has been ruined, though, and the ship's cargo hold is partly flooded with the water of the Styx sea. Whenever a face of the cube other than 1 or 2 rises to the surface, the shadar-kai caravel is dragged down beneath the water. Though the ship sinks a little more each time, it still maintains partial buoyancy from the air trapped within its cabins.

**Sole Survivor.** Any characters searching the ship for valuables or survivors find relatively recent footprints along the wet floor. These lead to a locked storage closet in the stern. The locked door can be picked with a successful DC 16 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, or smashed open with a successful DC 13 Strength check.

Hiding in the storage closet is Fern, a frightened and wary survivor of the shadar-kai expedition. Fern is a **shadar-kai shadow dancer** with the following changes:







SHADAR-KAI  
SHADOW  
DANCER

- Her Intelligence is 14.
- She wears a *cap of water breathing*.
- She wields a +1 *spiked chain*.

Fern is able to leave the galley and search the island when face 2 is up and the caravel is beached (see that section for more information). However, she has not figured out how to open the cube's doors. When the characters meet her, she is suffering only 1 physical level of the pixelating curse, since she is cured of it (and loses her memories of having been pixelated before) whenever the cube rolls and the caravel is resubmerged.

The closet contains all the valuable items Fern could scavenge from the ship: two *potions of healing* and a week's worth of soggy food and fresh water.

**Fractured Memories.** Fern and her crewmates—led by a shadar-kai elder—received a message from the Raven Queen that the walls of life and death had been breached, and that the dead had escaped. They journeyed to the island in an attempt to discover the nature of the breach and try to close it. But their mission turned to disaster when all except Fern were killed by the hydrolaths and the vampiric mists. Fern escaped by fleeing back to the ship and hiding. But a few hours later, the cube flipped

to send the caravel under the water with its anchor firmly stuck to the submerged side. Fern's *cap of water breathing* allowed her to survive the immersion, but did nothing to deter the Styx sea's memory-wiping effects.

Exposure to Styx water has created huge gaps in Fern's memory, including everything that has happened since she first sighted the island. She doesn't remember where she came from or what else the Raven Queen told the shadar-kai. She warns the characters that there are dangerous creatures in the water that ate her friends.

Additionally, if the characters befriend her, Fern shares one more memory so powerful that even the Styx sea can't erase it: she volunteered for the shadar-kai mission because she dreamed that her dead friend Astilbe was on the island and could be rescued. (Astilbe was one of the reborn souls doomed to fight on Acheron, but was converted into a pixelated creature and is now one of the skull lord's guards at area 6.31.) Fern will join the characters if they promise to help her search for Astilbe.

## FACE 2: ANCHOR POINT

The most notable feature of this face is the shadar-kai caravel (area 2.3) resting on its side, attached by its anchor chain and guarded by an unexpected defender. A number of metallic cubic 'rocks' are also scattered across the face, growing thickest in area 2.5.

### AREA 2.1: JUNCTION ROOM

A door at this location leads to a two-way junction room, then beyond to area 4.1.

### AREA 2.2: JUNCTION ROOM

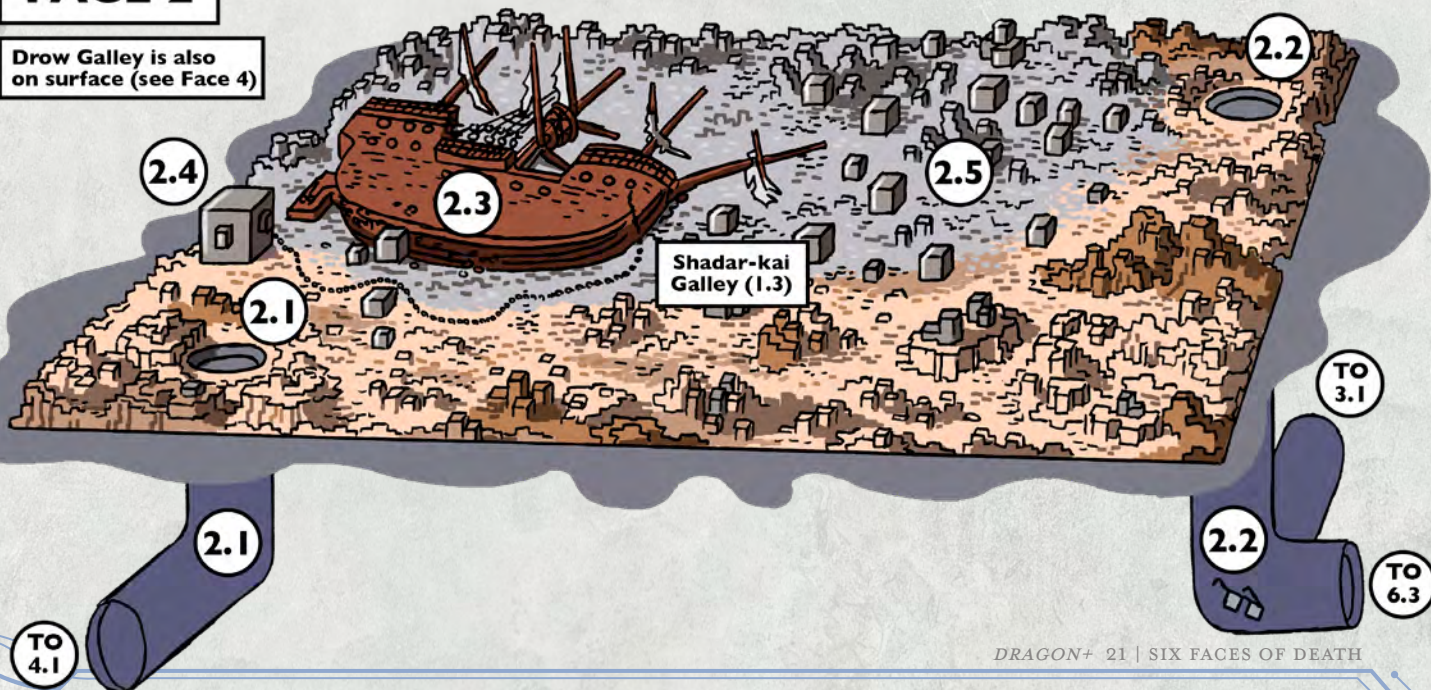
This door leads to a three-way junction room whose shafts lead on to area 3.1 and area 6.3. A set of *pixel glasses* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix) lie at the bottom of this shaft.

### AREA 2.3: SHADAR-KAI CARAVEL

The foundering shadar-kai ship is described at area 1.3, but characters who see it on this face will come to

## FACE 2

Drow Galley is also on surface (see Face 4)





understand how the shadar-kai accidentally anchored the ship too well. When the cube rolls and face 2 comes up, the shadar-kai caravel is pulled out of the water to end up lying on its side, as if thrown there by a giant. Its stout iron anchor chain, 100 feet long, leads away from the ship to area 2.4.

Like everything else on the island, the caravel is vulnerable to the pixelating curse. If face 2 is above the water when the characters first come to the island, the wood of the ship has already started to transform into brown cubes. Within four hours, the caravel is entirely pixelated, though it is still recognizable as a ship.

#### AREA 2.4: ANCHOR

When the shadar-kai caravel dropped its anchor, it was caught by the gravitational pull of face 2 and thoroughly embedded in the face's iron surface. That spot is now guarded by a confused gnomish construct called a **stone defender** (see *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*). Normally called upon as a bodyguard, the stone defender has decided that it guards the anchor, and it attacks anyone who approaches this area.

If face 2 has been out of the water for more than a few hours, the stone defender takes on the form of a human-sized gray cubical rock next to where the pixelated anchor is embedded. If anyone approaches, the construct attacks with surprise, with its False Appearance making its pixelated body blend into the pixelated landscape. If face 2 has just emerged from the water, the stone defender is in its true form of a stout, humanoid robot with stone plates bolted into its metal frame.

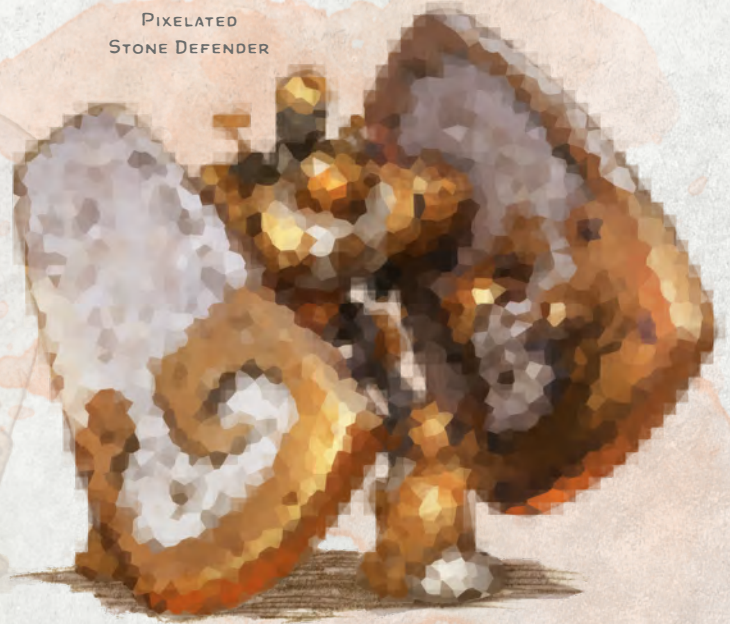
The stone defender normally defends the anchor until destroyed, but it can be tricked into guarding another item instead if the characters present one. Destroying the defender, getting it to guard another item, or cutting the anchor chain frees the shadar-kai caravel, which floats up freely (though it remains damaged and in need of serious repairs) the next time the cube rolls.

#### AREA 2.5: CLOCKWORK CONGREGATION

This section of the face is covered with metallic objects, all of them the remnants of clockworks created by Avnas. When the cube is pixelated, this area takes the form of an unusually large number of shining gray-and-brown metallic blocks, which continue over the edge to face 3. Some of the blocks make a ticking sound, or crawl and hop around.

When the cube isn't pixelated, the broken constructs can be seen in their real forms as strange bronze and iron devices, scattered among the dead bodies. Though

PIXELATED  
STONE DEFENDER



most of them are destroyed, a few still twitch, flip, or crawl in circles like malfunctioning toys.

Amid the harmless mass of barely functional clockwork devices, a number of constructs are potential threats. Each time the characters approach this area, or each 10 minutes they spend here, roll a d6 to determine what they encounter. All these creatures can be found in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. You might wish to use the Clockwork Malfunctions table in that book to give personality to these damaged constructs.

##### d6 Construct Encounter

1–2	2d4 <b>bronze scouts</b>
3	1 <b>oaken bolter</b>
4	1d2 <b>iron cobras</b>
5	1 <b>stone defender</b>
6	1d4 <b>duergar screamers</b>

**Bronze Scouts.** When encountered, these bronze scouts are in the process of pushing the dead around the face of the cube. They crawl toward any creatures they can see or hear to assess them, but lose interest in living creatures and depart the following round if they are ignored. If attacked, the bronze scouts fight until destroyed.

**Oaken Bolter.** This war machine immediately begins firing at any creature that moves within its field of view. Its vision and memory are poor, though, so if any creatures hide or stand perfectly still for 2 rounds, it ignores them and rolls away.

**Iron Cobras.** Any iron cobras the characters stumble upon are hiding, aided by their impressive Dexterity (Stealth) checks and the advantage they gain on those checks if the face is pixelated. If an iron cobra takes any damage, it flees and hides.

**Stone Defender.** The stone defender has picked a spot or a random object to guard, gesturing threateningly at any creature that comes close, and attacking if any creature comes within 5 feet. If left alone, the construct forgets about the spot or object it defends, then wanders off and repeats the process.

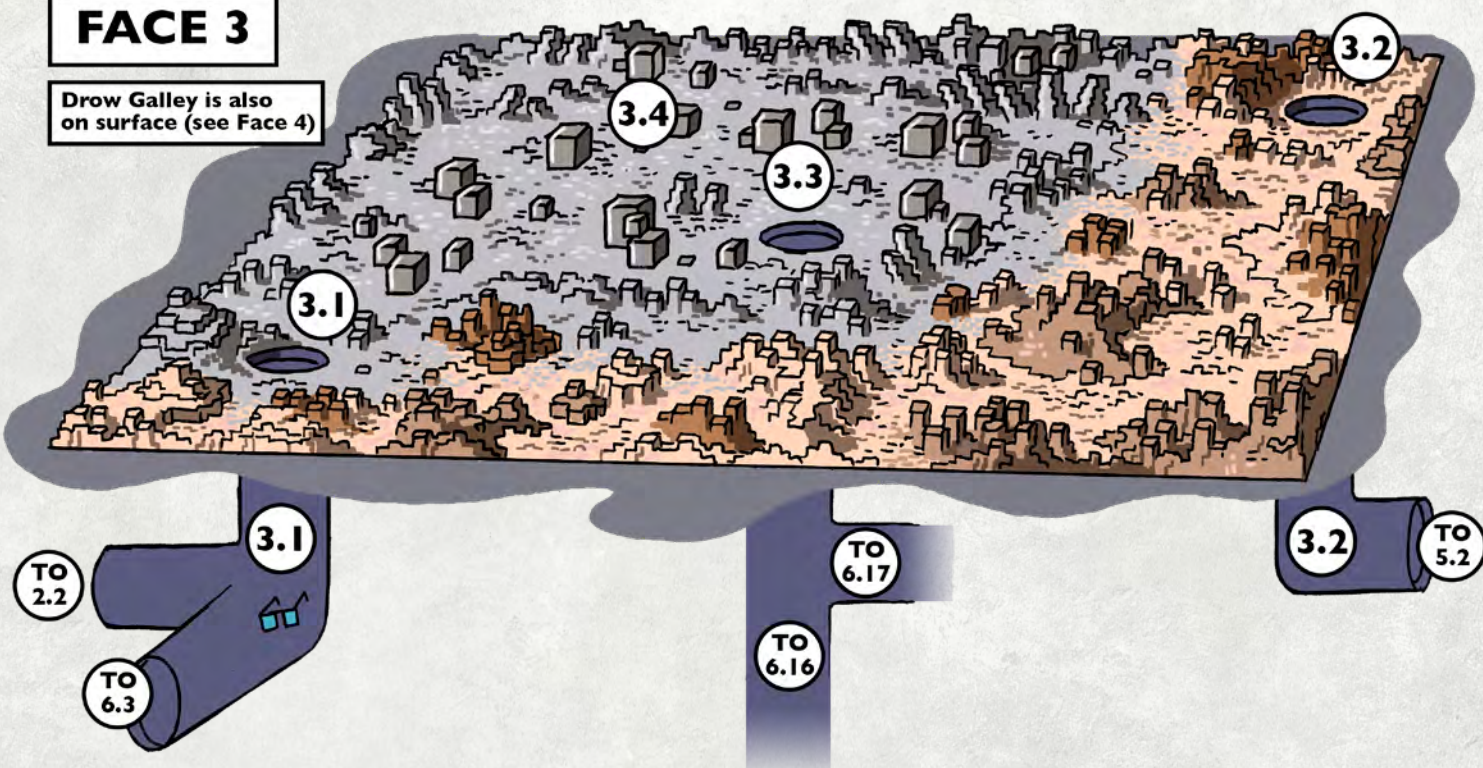
PIXELATED BRONZE SCOUT





## FACE 3

Drow Galley is also on surface (see Face 4)



**Duergar Screamer.** With their shrill, terrifying voices, these constructs are heard before they are seen. They hunt and fight all non-duergar humanoids until destroyed.

### FACE 3: JUNKYARD

Face 3 appears as a wasteland of rock or bodies, depending on its pixelated state. It has few notable features except the large number of metallic blocks and cubes that spread across its surface.

#### AREA 3.1: JUNCTION ROOM

This door leads to a three-way junction room whose shafts lead on to area 2.2 and area 6.3. A pair of *pixel glasses* (see the “New Magic Items” appendix) lie at the bottom of this shaft.

#### AREA 3.2: JUNCTION ROOM

A door at this location leads to a two-way junction room, then beyond to area 5.2.

#### AREA 3.3: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6, and a short corridor leads to the junction space between areas 6.16 and 6.17.

#### AREA 3.4: CLOCKWORK CONGREGATION

This area of metallic cubes is identical to area 2.5, and has the same random construct encounters.

### FACE 4: GARDEN OF THE DEAD

Face 4 is a wasteland of rock or bodies, depending on its pixelated state. Its dominant feature is the enormous green mass of juvenile corpse flowers that spreads across area 4.5.

#### AREA 4.1: JUNCTION ROOM

This door leads to a two-way junction room and area 2.1 beyond. Anyone who emerges from or approaches this door draws the attention of the corpse flower at area 4.5.

#### AREA 4.2: SPECIAL JUNCTION ROOM

An interior door opens up 40 feet beyond the exterior door. Halfway between the exterior and interior doors, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6. Beyond the interior door is area 6.33A.

#### AREA 4.3: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6, and a short corridor leads to the junction space between area 6.1 and area 6.8.

Any creature moving toward this area through level 6 simply climbs along a ladder, passing the ‘horizontal’ ladder shaft to area 4.3 as they do. However, creatures descending from area 4.3 must carefully navigate a change in the cube’s internal gravity.

**Deadly Gravity.** From the perspective of those coming from area 4.3, the shaft abruptly opens up in what appears to be the ceiling of a two-way corridor. Two of the four ladders leading down curve and run along the ceiling of this corridor, while the other two go halfway down the wall of the corridor before turning 90 degrees to the left and right. Looking down into the corridor, the characters see that the T corridor ends in another circular metal door (area 6.1) in one direction. In the other direction, the corridor continues 60 feet before widening out into a strange room filled with blocky furniture (area 6.8). With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character notices that the furniture in area 6.8 appears to be on the wall, while the floor is bare except for a few glowing lights.



A character who climbs down the ladder from area 4.3 to the corridor feels their legs suddenly falling out from under them, as their lower body is pulled toward area 6.8 while their upper body remains in the gravitation of face 4. The character must make a successful DC 13 Strength saving throw to hold onto the ladder rungs. On a failed save, the character falls and instantly whooshes down the corridor—whose gravity suddenly makes it an open shaft. The character takes 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage from the 60-foot fall into area 6.8, lands prone, and is quickly surrounded by pixelated **merregon**<sup>™</sup> and pixelated **veteran** guards. See area 6.8 for more details.

If a character expects it, the gravity shift is easy to overcome by carefully climbing down one of the curved ladders onto the apparent ceiling of the corridor. This leaves the character clinging to the ladder going down, as the ceiling turns out to be one of the walls of the shaft.

#### AREA 4.4: JUNCTION ROOM

This door leads to a three-way junction whose shafts lead on to area 5.4 and area 6.4.

#### AREA 4.5: CORPSE FLOWER GARDEN

A **corpse flower** (detailed in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*) grows here with nine bodies stuck in its tendrils. Spreading out around the flourishing flower is a carpet of juvenile plants: a thick mat of fleshy green leaves and tiny purple blossoms that reek of rotten flesh. This mat of greenery spills over the edge of the cube to area 1.2 on face 1.

The corpse flower attacks any living creatures that get close to it or attack it, and it moves slowly toward such creatures when it sees them. It routinely dispenses with its nine corpses to heal itself or send zombies against the characters, knowing that it has a near-unlimited supply of the dead beneath its roots. The corpse flower and the dead beneath it are always unpixelated, as the



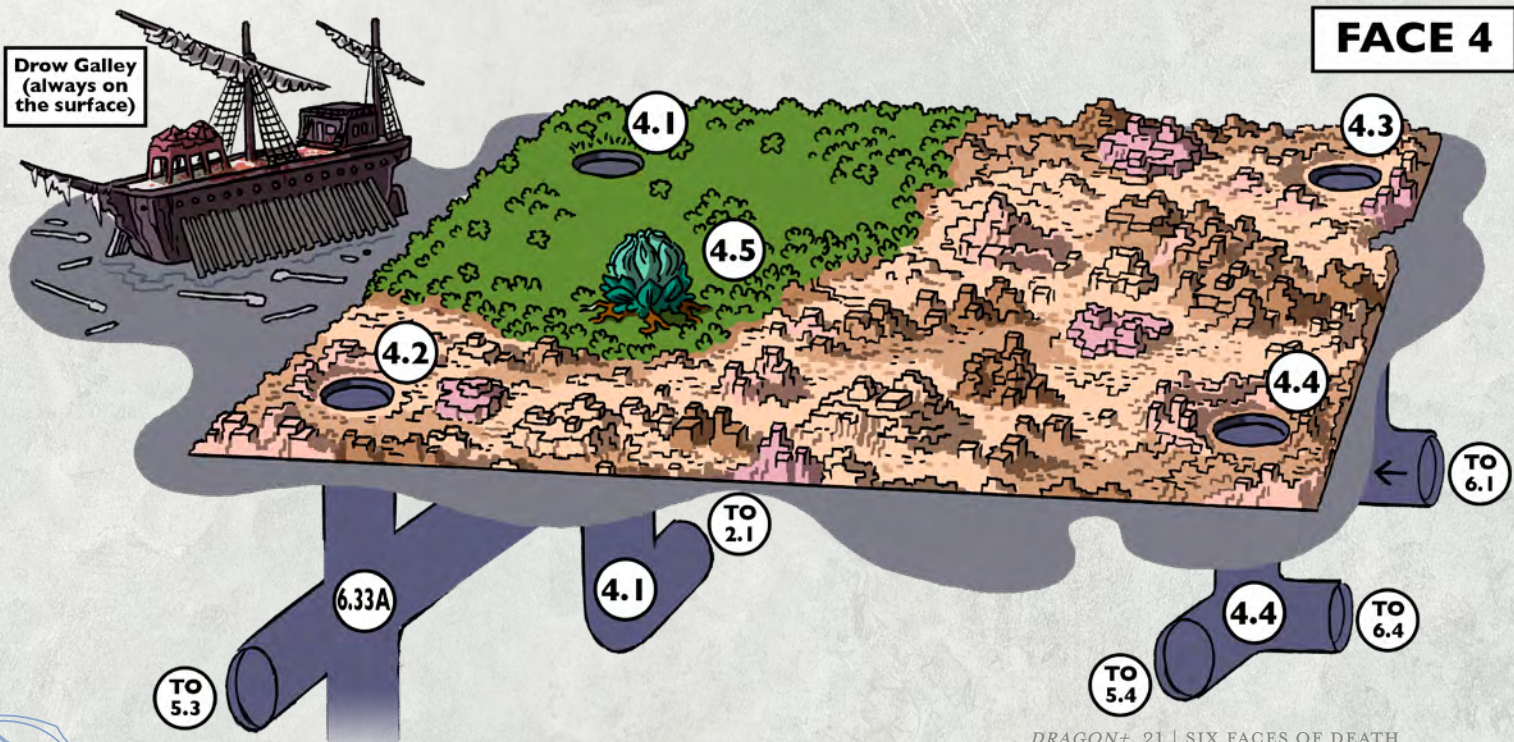
CORPSE FLOWER

Styx water the plant draws up through its roots washes through the bodies.

If the adventurers kill the corpse flower, they can dig beneath its roots, finding 1,200 gp, 400 sp, and a gold and jade death mask worth 900 gp.

#### FACE 5: BEAUTIFUL ISLAND

This face appears as a verdant tropical island. Sandy beaches open up to island grass and shrubs, beyond which spreads a jungle of banana plants, coconut palms,







and other trees. Gentle breezes blow here, and the gray fog that covers the island seems less oppressive than it does on other faces.

This vista seems entirely real. The sand and plants can be picked up, touched, and smelled, and even appear immune to the pixelating curse. But with closer investigation, characters might begin to spot cracks in this facade. No birds or animals can be heard or seen on the island. The breadfruit, bananas, and other seemingly edible plants are tasteless and provide no nutrition. The wood of the trees quickly begins to rot if cut, and the grass and shrubs will not burn.

Another giveaway as to the true nature of face 5 can be noted by characters who have visited the drow galley: the smell of the balhannoth. Any character who inspects the cargo hold of the drow ship and then comes to face 5 recognizes the same foul smell with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, and notes that smell growing stronger toward area 5.5. For the characters who don't recognize it, the smell is faintly bothersome but easy to ignore.

### WARPED REALITY

The appearance of face 5 has been warped and reshaped by the balhannoth lairing under area 5.5. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more

information about the balhannoth). The balhannoth can sense the presence of any creatures on face 5, and has been using its telepathy to sense the desires of all creatures within one mile of the island since it escaped its confinement on the drow ship. The appearance of the pleasant island has been created in response to the thoughts of the many sailors that have come to investigate the cube.

The balhannoth's hunting partner is the adult oblex that dwells at area 5.1, and which can take the form of living creatures that the balhannoth can't create. Unified by the conforming power of the pixelating curse, the two normally solitary creatures have formed a symbiotic relationship where they communicate telepathically and hunt prey together. When face 5 is submerged, they retreat beneath the doors until it surfaces again.

If the balhannoth dies, face 5 is slowly transformed back into its true form over 10 minutes—another wasteland of rock or bodies, depending on the state of its pixelation.

### AREA 5.1: OBLEX DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6, and a shaft leads on to area 6.42. This shaft is filled with white and pink deposits of pixelated slime—the remains of the oblex's meals.

An **adult oblex**—a psychic ooze that can generate simulacra in the form of other creatures—uses this door to come and go. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for full details on the oblex.) The oblex can generate 1d4 + 1 simulacra resembling living creatures whose memories it has stolen. The number of creatures it managed to kill during the chaotic attacks that brought the cube to the Material Plane has given it a host of fiendish and humanoid forms it can take on.

Creating simulacra of people needing aid or weak fiends just asking to be destroyed, the oblex sends those simulacra out of the jungle near area 5.1, while it stays concealed within the trees. (The oblex's true form is pixelated, resembling a large mass of pink and red jelly-like cubes. But it can create nonpixelated bodies to lure prey.) If only one or two characters are present, the oblex attacks through one of its simulacra at once. If more are present, it tries to get the group to split up, sending some to the pool at area 5.5 and encouraging others to descend through the door and head for areas 6.42 and 6.43, where its oblex spawn lie in wait.

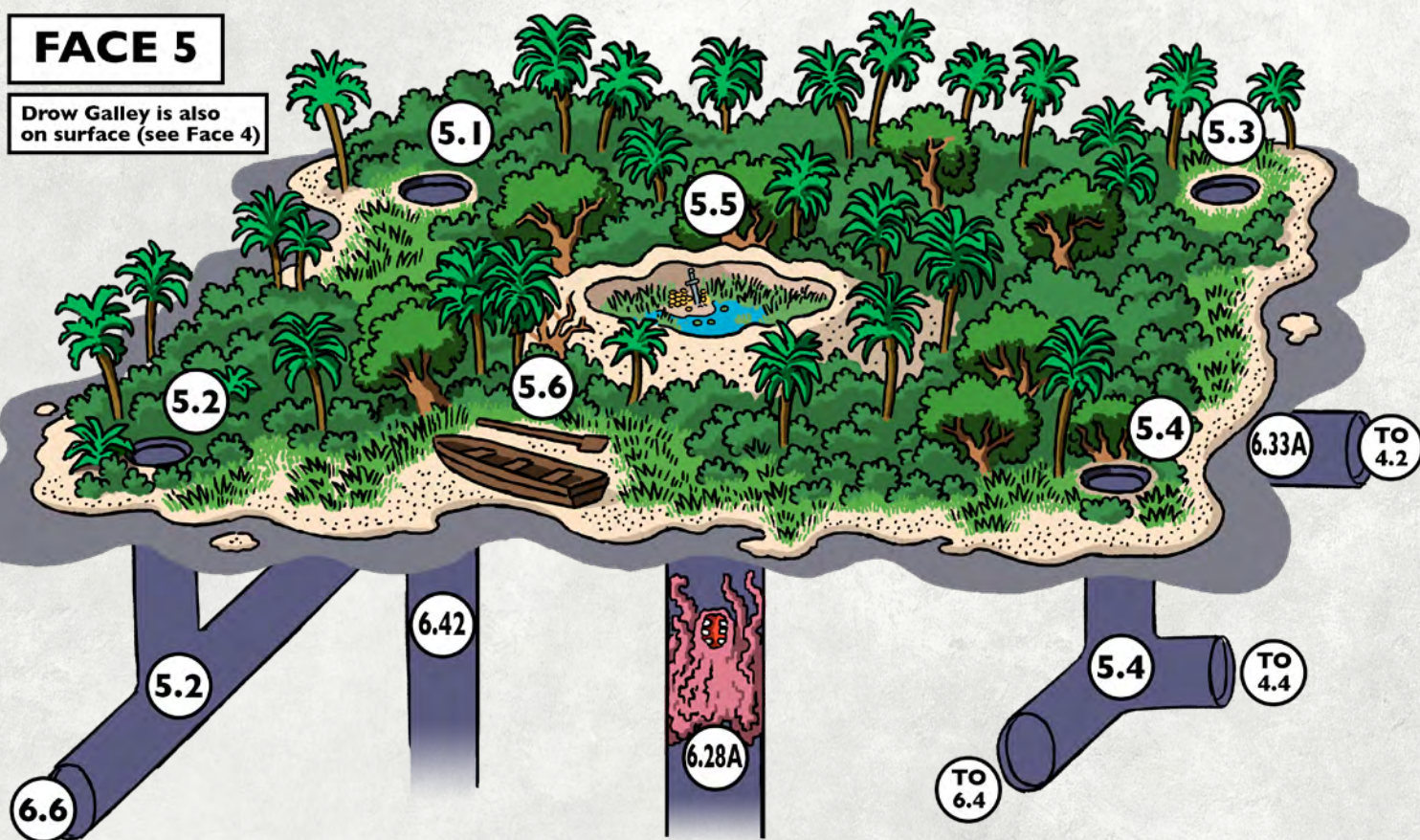
A character who interacts with a simulacrum notices that it carries a faint scent of sulfur. A character might also notice the pixelated pink tether connecting the simulacrum to the oblex with a successful Wisdom (Perception) check opposed by the Oblex's Charisma (Deception) check.

Because the oblex is lawful, the door won't close on its tether if it and any of its simulacra are on opposite sides of it. If the door is held open in this way for more than a few minutes, the oblex either retreats down the shaft or slithers up onto the surface.



## FACE 5

Drow Galley is also on surface (see Face 4)



### AREA 5.2: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6, and a short corridor leads to the junction space between area 6.6 and area 6.42.

Any creature moving toward this area through level 6 simply climbs along a ladder, passing the 'horizontal' ladder shaft to area 5.2 as they do. However, creatures descending from area 5.2 must carefully navigate a change in the cube's internal gravity.

**Deadly Gravity.** From the perspective of those coming from area 5.2, the shaft abruptly opens up in what appears to be the ceiling of a two-way corridor. Two of the four ladders leading down curve and run along the ceiling of this corridor, while the other two go halfway down the wall of the corridor before turning 90 degrees to the left and right. Looking down into the corridor, the characters see that the T corridor ends in another circular metal door (area 6.6) in one direction. In the other direction, the corridor continues a long distance into darkness.

Where the shaft from area 5.2 meets the shaft below, a shapeless red cubic mosaic stands out on the otherwise featureless black iron wall. If touched, some of it rubs off. If any character has *true seeing* or views the mosaic with *pixel glasses*, they see the pixelated mosaic in its true form as a message written in blood by a previous visitor. The message reads in Common: 'THE FLOOR BECOMES THE WALL! LOOK OUT!'

A character who climbs down the ladder from area 5.2 to the corridor feels their legs suddenly falling out from

under them, as their lower body is pulled toward area 6.42 while their upper body remains in the gravitation of face 5. The character must make a successful DC 13 Strength saving throw to hold onto the ladder rungs. On a failed save, the character falls and instantly whooshes down the corridor—whose gravity suddenly makes it an open shaft. The character falls nearly 600 feet to area 6.42, taking 20d6 bludgeoning damage.

If a character expects it, the gravity shift is easy to overcome by carefully climbing down one of the curved ladders onto the apparent ceiling of the corridor. This leaves the character clinging to the ladder going down, as the ceiling turns out to be one of the walls of the shaft.

### AREA 5.3: SPECIAL JUNCTION ROOM

An interior door opens up 40 feet beyond the exterior door. Halfway between the exterior and interior doors, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6. Beyond the interior door is area 6.33A.

### AREA 5.4: JUNCTION ROOM

This three-way junction room leads to the doors at area 4.4 and area 6.4.

### AREA 5.5: POOL

At the center of the false jungle, the ground plunges down beneath tall trees to form a crater containing a shallow pool of clear water 30 feet below its upper edge. It takes a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to climb down the crater without a rope. The pool is 3 feet deep, with lily pads on its surface and horsetails and grasses growing along the shore. A tempting pile of treasure is spread along the edge of the pool—873 gp,



10 opals (100 gp each), a gold bracelet (250 gp), a suit of drow-made +2 *leather armor*, and a brass incense burner covered with fiendish symbols—a *censer of blood*. (See the “New Magic Item” appendix for more information on the *censer of blood*. Originally carried by the oinoloth now a prisoner in area 6.11A, the censer was lost here in the frenzied fight when the yugoloths were attacked by the balhannoth. That creature has no idea of the censer’s power.)

When not transformed by the balhannoth, the inside of the crater is a metal shaft with a spiral ramp carved along its sides, and which ends in a 20-foot-wide door identical to any of the other doors on or within the cube. But between this door and the interior door below waits the hungry **balhannoth** that has created face 5’s false island paradise.

**Unseen Threats.** The balhannoth is fully pixelated, appearing as a monstrous blob of cubes with four long, semicubic tentacles and a blind mouth of gnashing rectangular teeth. Its pixelated nature has bound its unnatural power to the cube, so that its blindsight and its lair actions extend beyond their normal range and across the full breadth of face 5. This makes the balhannoth aware of the movements of any creatures on the beautiful island. Though it is capable of hunting on the surface, it prefers to lure creatures down to the pool, whereupon it teleports to the top of the crater to leave prey trapped between it and the door.

The balhannoth can also simply teleport creatures under the door of this area, using its lair action. A deadly ambush predator, it lives to hunt and uses this method only rarely. But if the characters bring any NPCs onto face 5 with them, the balhannoth can pick them off this way, creating the impression of comrades simply vanishing into the jungle with no warning.

Being fully pixelated has made the balhannoth a servant of the skull lord. If the characters enter the cube without killing the balhannoth, the skull lord can telepathically summon the creature into the cube to help trap the characters in a specialized prison. See area 6.25 for more information.

**Cannon Shaft.** The exterior door at the bottom of the pool opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. The area between the two doors smells of rotten flesh and is littered with pixelated bones and rags from the balhannoth’s victims. Unlike most of the other shafts in the tube, there are no ladders in this shaft, and the walls are warm and streaked with strange colors. This is Cube 1717’s cannon shaft, which continues some 250 feet down into the heart of the cube (see area 6.28A).

### AREA 5.6: FERRY

A few feet from the water along the edge of the beach lies a simple wooden boat that fits up to six people. A long wooden boating pole lies nearby. The boat is in fine condition and seaworthy, though it smells strongly of the Styx sea. Any character who inspects it closely can see that what first appeared to be natural lines in the wood are actually countless names carved into the boat’s plank surface. The boat radiates abjuration to a *detect magic* spell, and it is immune to fire, acid, cold, poison, and lightning damage. The pole radiates

conjunction to a *detect magic* spell, and is a magic item—the *merrenoloth’s oar*, described in the “New Magic Items” appendix.

This place is where the oinoloth and its guards made landfall on the island for the yugoloths’ ill-fated assault. The boat and the *merrenoloth’s oar* are both immune to the pixelating curse. With a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check, a character inspecting the boat recalls the legends of the ferryboats of the River Styx, and can guess that the names scribed into the boat are, in fact, the names of the dead.

## FACE 6: FACE OF EVIL

The surface of face 6 appears as a wasteland of rock or bodies with no notable features except its six doors. Though the characters have no way to note this from outside, this is the “master face” with which the cube’s internal gravity is aligned.

Many of the locations within this face are given both pixelated and unpixelated descriptions. The characters can see the latter if they use the *pixel glasses* or temporarily unpixelate part of the room with *dispel magic*, *remove curse*, or Styx water.

See “Running the Adventure,” earlier in this document, for guidelines on how to handle encounters with the defenders of the cube.

### AREA 6.1: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, a side passage lined with ladders leads off to area 4.3, while the main shaft continues down 60 feet to the lighted room at area 6.8.

If characters coming down from area 6.1 try to walk into area 4.3, they find it unexpectedly difficult as gravity shifts, making area 4.3 appear to be above them. However, the effect is only disorienting—not potentially deadly as it is for characters coming from area 4.3 (see that area’s description for details).

### AREA 6.2: INTERIOR DOOR

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, the shaft continues down another 60 feet to the lighted room at area 6.9.

### AREA 6.3: JUNCTION ROOM

This door leads to a three-way junction room whose shafts lead on to area 2.2 and area 3.1. A set of *pixel glasses* (see the “New Magic Items” appendix) lie at the bottom of this shaft.

### AREA 6.4: JUNCTION ROOM

This door leads to a three-way junction room whose shafts lead on to area 4.4 and area 5.4.

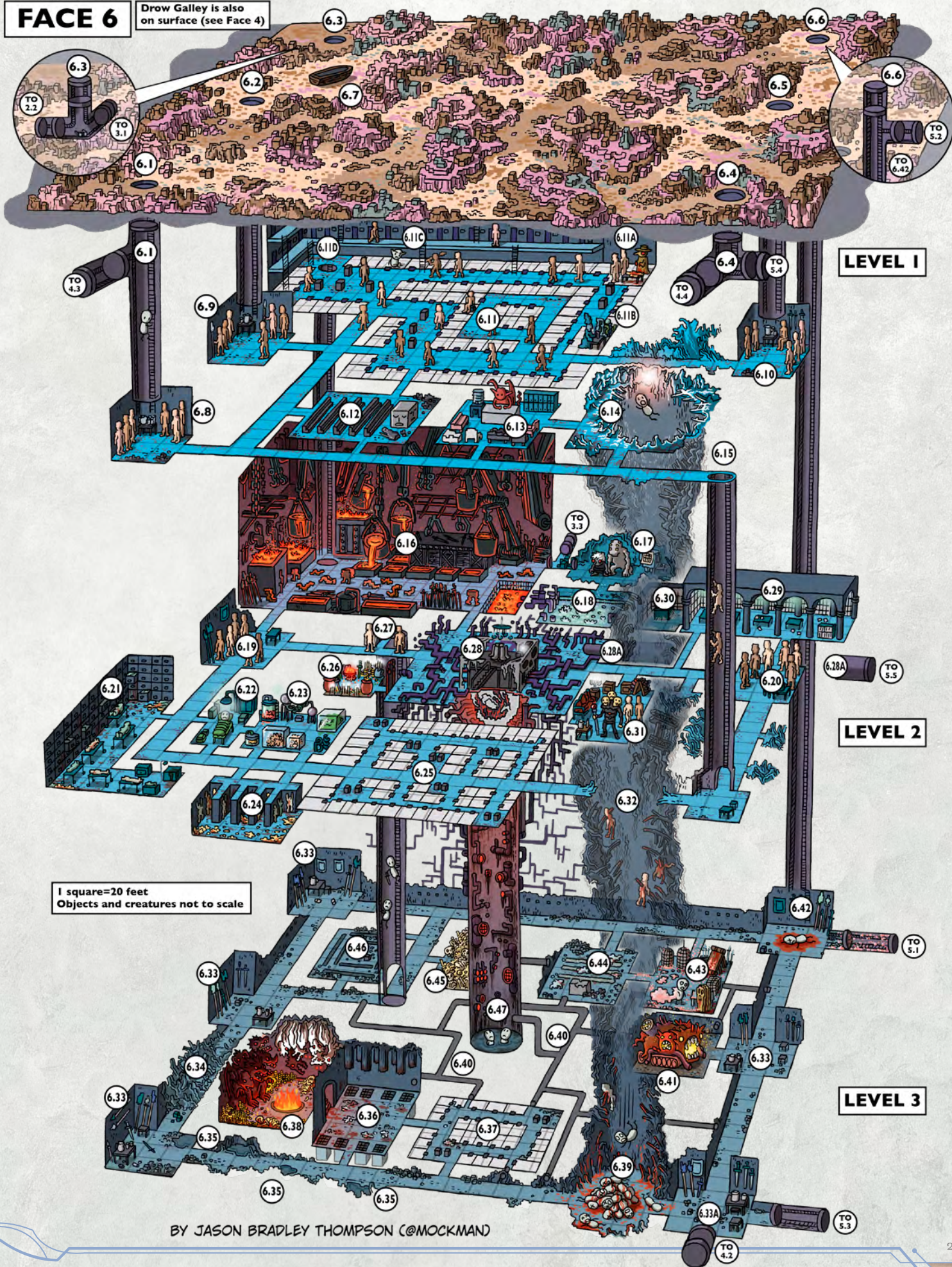
### AREA 6.5: INTERIOR DOOR

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, the shaft continues down another 60 feet to the lighted room at area 6.10.



# FACE 6

Drow Galley is also on surface (see Face 4)



BY JASON BRADLEY THOMPSON (@MOCKMAN)



### AREA 6.6: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, a side passage lined with ladders leads off to area 5.2, while the main shaft continues down into darkness, eventually reaching area 6.42 nearly 600 feet below.

If characters coming down from area 6.6 try to walk into area 5.2, they find it unexpectedly difficult as gravity shifts, making area 5.2 appear to be above them. However, the effect is only disorienting—not potentially deadly as it is for characters coming from area 5.2 (see that area's description for details).

### AREA 6.7: WATERLOGGED BOAT

An ordinary wooden rowboat, similar to any the characters would have seen in the port they started out from, lies here among the cubic landscape, filled nearly to the brim with the murky black water of the Styx sea. The rowboat belonged to a large merchant vessel that recently landed on the island. The hydrolaths sunk the ship and killed the crew, but the sunken rowboat was caught in the gravitational pull of face 6. Because it remains full of Styx water, the boat hasn't pixelated yet.

### AREA 6.8: GUARDROOM

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** Four iron ladders lead down into a square chamber, lit by panels in the blocky walls that glow with a soft white light. Gray tables, chairs, and benches are made of rectangles and blocks. Vaguely weapon-like items also made of blocks hang on rungs set into the walls. Six faceless, blocky humanoid figures stand against the walls.

**Unpixelated.** In addition to normal tables, chairs, and benches, this room features walls lined with rivets and pipes, round glass panels that glow with light, and a number of weapons on weapons racks. A water jug, six mugs, some hunks of unidentifiable meat, rulers, calipers, crossbows, bolts, and valueless personal items are scattered about.

**Pixelated Guards.** The six figures here are three pixelated **merregons**<sup>M</sup> and three pixelated **veterans**—fanatical defenders of the cube who see all nonpixelated beings as grotesque mutants. If the characters don't seem immediately threatening, the pixelated guards offer to escort them to the reception room (area 6.13). They won't let anyone roam the cube without escorts. If the characters broke through the interior door or otherwise displayed violent tendencies, five of the guards attack while the sixth goes to alert the skull lord at area 6.31.

### AREA 6.9: GUARDROOM

This area is identical to area 6.8, and contains three pixelated **merregons**<sup>M</sup> and three pixelated **veterans**.

### AREA 6.10: GUARDROOM

This area is identical to area 6.8, and contains three pixelated **merregons**<sup>M</sup> and three pixelated **veterans**.

### AREA 6.11: UPPER LEVEL BARRACKS

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** This high-ceilinged room resembles a warehouse or a prison cell block, with ladders leading up to several levels of walkways. Along each level are numerous black metal doors fitted with small, square-barred windows. Most windows reveal identical cell-like rooms beyond, each containing only shelves in the walls and a number of large blocks or cubes. One cell along each section of wall is instead empty, and tiled in white. The cell doors have no locks. Blocky machines stand in the central corridor between the rows of cells, and the whole area is lit by white glowing bricks in the walls.

**Unpixelated.** The individual rooms contain bunk beds, tables, crates, simple toilets, sinks, and other plain furniture. A few hold personal items such as dishes, weapons, and cloth rags.

**Warriors' Quarters.** These rooms were previously inhabited by the Acheronian army that inhabited the cube. The many empty rooms contain only valueless personal items. Characters who thoroughly explore the barracks also find occasional cells that contain incomprehensible machinery or pipes leaking magical fluids.

**Slime Showers.** Each of the white-tiled chambers features a large pixelated drain at the center of its floor, and a large pixelated faucet on the wall. If the faucet is turned, a bubbling sound emerges from the drain, followed by an eruption of white pixelated slime that moves across the floor as if alive. The white slime is a hazard that eats only dead organic material, and is used by the soldiers to clean themselves. If any characters allow the slime to crawl up their bodies, it presses against them to cleanse them of sweat, dead skin, and dirt—along with any nonmagical clothing and gear with an organic origin (including most cloth, leather, and wood). The slime flows back into the drain when its cleaning is done, or if attacked.

**Food and Water Dispensers.** The blocky machines are fountain-like devices operated by buttons, tubes, and cranks. One dispenses small waxed-paper boxes holding water, which can be pierced open and drunk. The other machine dispenses soft cubes of macerated meat-like pulp made from the flesh of lemures—creatures unworthy of being soldiers and condemned to be eaten by their betters. Unpixelated food takes the form of a sloppy paste instead of a cube. It is harmless to eat, though extremely unappetizing.

**Off-Duty Threats.** The pixelated guards come here in shifts to eat, drink, and rest. When the characters first arrive, nine pixelated **merregons**<sup>M</sup> and nine pixelated **veterans** are resting in rooms or wandering the central corridors. The maximum number of guards here will easily overwhelm even a 13th-level party, so a stealthy approach is warranted—and characters might need to flee if a serious fight breaks out. Additionally, unless the characters are stealthy, creatures in areas 6.11A, 6.11B, or 6.11C hear them when they enter 6.11.

Every 4 hours, six of the guards here switch out with guards in areas 6.8, 6.9, 6.10, 6.19, or 6.20.



### AREA 6.11A. OINOLOTH'S ROOM

Malika Tahoun ("Queen Plague") dwells in this area. The **oinoloth**<sup>M</sup> appears as an unpixelated humanoid figure that is completely covered so that none of its flesh is visible. It wears leather robes, a stained apron, leather boots and gloves, and a bird-faced leather mask and helmet with a long beak and two smoked-glass goggles over the eyes. Two pixelated **merregons**<sup>M</sup> with halberds stand within 5 feet of it at all times, watching it and preventing it from leaving the cube.

This cell is distinguished from the others by two pixelated bodies on the table inside (playthings of the oinoloth) and a partially pixelated ivory chess set worth 100 gp (a gift from the skull lord). Any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 18 or higher smells the blood from the room just passing by through area 6.11. The oinoloth has no treasure. Any mortal foolish enough to wear its leather robes or mask is infected by horrible diseases of your devising.

**Fiendish Bargains.** Malika surrendered to the skull lord when the rest of the yugoloth away team were killed. The magic suit it wears protects it from the pixelating curse. Respecting it as a potential ally—and unable to claim its plague-ridden head—the skull lord is waiting to see if it becomes necessary to have the oinoloth become part of the Six-Face Throne. The oinoloth is happy to wait—and is hopeful that other yugoloths or Bane's forces mount a more successful assault on the cube.

Using its telepathy, the oinoloth can communicate with the characters without being overheard by its guards. In the interest of gaining their aid, it uses its Corrupted Healing to heal wounded characters or cure the pixelating curse. This triggers a fight with the attending merregons at once.

The oinoloth knows almost everything the skull lord knows, and can also tell the characters about the *censer of blood* that it lost somewhere on face 5. But if the characters agree to aid it, the selfish and evil oinoloth doesn't risk its hide in a face-to-face fight with the skull lord or its servants. It instead leaves the cube as soon as possible, taking the censer with it if it can—preferably by killing one or more characters for it.

### AREA 6.11B. SLADEK'S ROOM

If he has not been encountered already, Sladek the wizard is 50 percent likely to be in this room when the characters enter area 6.11. Otherwise, he is in area 6.23.

Sladek is completely pixelated, but he can be easily identified from among the other pixel guards by his blue coloring (from his genasi skin and blue robes) and his tall, conically cubic wizard's hat. Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Insight) check makes the connection that this is the mage they're looking for.

Sladek now willingly serves the skull lord as a trusted advisor, and he happily betrays the party to Vargo even if the characters are former friends or allies. Sladek is a pixelated **mage**, giving him the following changes:

- His alignment is lawful neutral.
- He has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.

Being attuned to the Six-Face Throne, he can also communicate telepathically with the skull lord at any distance.

- He is immune to the frightened condition.
- He has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

If Sladek casts any spells that produce a visual effect, that effect is pixelated.

**Wizard's Work.** A pixelated *driftglobe* lights the room, which is filled with pixelated wizards' equipment. Sladek's spellbook (identifiable as a large violet book but illegible unless unpixelated) sits on his chair. Tables in the room have been set up with alchemical equipment, with which Sladek studies the interactions of different types of pixelated matter. The equipment is visible as pixelated glass tubes in which pixelated liquids stir and pixelated green, red, and blue flames flicker. The equipment can be used or sold as alchemist's supplies.

In one corner of the room, a small chest is inscribed with a *glyph of warding* that is impossible to see when the chest is pixelated. When unpixelated, it can be found with a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Opening the chest triggers the glyph's *cloudkill* spell. Within the chest are a *potion of healing*, two *potions of climbing*, and a *spell scroll of control water*.

### AREA 6.11C: SIMAK'S ROOM

The drow captain Simak is found lurking in her cell when the characters pass through this area. She is here whenever she is not playing court jester to Vargo. After seeing her forces annihilated by the skull lord and its servants, she escaped the same fate only by pretending to have been rendered an entertaining idiot by the effects of the Styx sea. Amused, Vargo lets her wander the cube freely, but the pixelated guards have orders to not let her reach the surface.

Simak knows the skull lord's plans and the oinoloth's powers. She looks constantly for any opportunity to escape the cube, and might reveal her subterfuge to the characters if she thinks they might help her. Naturally, she betrays them immediately if doing so helps her escape.

Simak is a **drow house captain** (see *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*) with the following changes:

- Her Intelligence is 14 and she has Deception +5.
- She has a +1 bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls with her magic weapons (see below).
- She also carries a mundane poisoned dagger hidden in her boot: +8 to hit; 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) poison damage.

Simak has become aware that her *amulet of the Styx* is the reason she has not pixelated like other creatures. (See the "New Magic Items" appendix for details on the amulet.) She also wears a white spider-silk cape (300 gp), a chrysoberyl ring (150 gp), and an alexandrite ring (600 gp), and she carries a pouch holding *oil of slipperiness*, three doses of assassin's blood poison, and five doses of drow poison. See chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for information on poisons.



Simak's *+1 hand crossbow*, *+1 scimitar*, and *+1 whip*, all clearly of drow make, are hidden under some pixelated rags beneath the lower bunk.

#### AREA 6.11D: LADDER SHAFT

A 20-foot-wide shaft with ladders on all four sides runs some 200 feet between the upper and middle levels beneath face 6. When Cube 1717 was fully functional, magic in the shaft allowed freight and important individuals to levitate up and down, but that magic has failed.

#### AREA 6.12: TEMPLE OF THE CUBE

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** This blocky chamber has an arched cathedral-like roof, lit by partially hidden glowing white wall panels high in the nave. Long black rectangular benches face a huge gray block with the crude outline of a noseless face engraved on all its visible sides. Lying on its side in the back of the chamber is a smaller blocky statue of black metal, apparently depicting an armored humanoid.

**Unpixelated.** The room is a temple, with an elaborate cathedral roof and black pews facing the central object of worship. This place was once a temple to Bane, the god of tyranny, whom the fallen statue depicts as a tall man in dark knightly armor. The statue has been desecrated and replaced with a recently forged statue of the Archquadrone. However, hymns to Bane in Infernal are still scribed on the walls.

A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies the new steel statue as resembling the body of a quadrone without its arms, legs, and wings. Its face has a lordly expression, as if about to speak a command.

Once per day on a regular schedule, all the pixelated guards come here to pray. Each time the characters enter this area, roll a d6. On a 1, three pixelated **merregons**<sup>M</sup> and three pixelated **veterans** are here, rapt in worship and easy to surprise.

#### AREA 6.13: RECEPTION ROOM

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** This room is lit by glowing white squares in the ceiling and floor. Several angular chairs and divans face a crude, blocky metal desk on a square dais, behind which sits a high-backed blocky chair. A red-skinned, naked humanoid sits in the high-backed chair, possessed of a grotesque, hairless head and long bat wings.

Behind the desk are numerous cabinets and chests of drawers, and a strange, blocky machine. Crudely angular gray statues stand about the room, with a vague resemblance to humanoids in armor.

**Unpixelated.** This place has the appearance of a mundane waiting room—except for the features appropriate to the Lower Planes. The statues depict Bane, Loviatar, and other mighty lawful evil beings. The cabinets and chests are filled with writing instruments, paperwork, and scrolls in Infernal listing the names of countless dead souls who ended up in Acheron due to their service (conscious

or otherwise) of Bane, Loviatar, and Tiamat—the lords of tyranny, cruelty, and greed. The machine is a water dispenser (see area 6.11). Despite their angular appearance, the chairs and divans are quite comfortable.

**Welcoming Committee.** The bat-winged humanoid is Bunch, a **berbalang**<sup>M</sup> ally of the skull lord. Bunch is resistant to the pixelating curse because of the creature's extraplanar nature. Though it has the appearance of a devil, the berbalang is not a fiend at all. Rather, it came to the cube for the vast wealth of bodies upon it, which it plunders for the chance to speak with the dead. It gladly agreed to assist the skull lord and its pixelated servants in exchange for access to these riches, which it gathers in area 6.45.

When the characters arrive here, the berbalang is working where the bureaucrats of the cube once sorted new arrivals to Acheron, welcoming them to an afterlife of eternal servitude and war. It welcomes the adventurers as if mistaking them for dead souls, asking them what they did when they were alive, what they would like to do in their new existence in the afterlife, and so on.

The berbalang's seemingly misguided questions have an evil design. It was been charged by Vargo with noting and delivering any intelligent visitors that have come to the cube, so that the skull lord can steal their skulls to activate more faces of the Six-Face Throne (see area 6.28). The berbalang takes special note of wizard characters, and might also ask other characters to take



BERBALANG



“intelligence tests.” (These tests can be summarized quickly, represented by a few clever riddles, or turned into a long comedy sequence, as you desire.)

When the *berbalang* has learned all it can from the characters, it suggests they might like to rest and offers them a room in area 6.11 or area 6.25. If they ask to talk to someone in charge, it offers to introduce them to Vargo, the lord of the cube. If the characters seem like they might cause trouble, the *berbalang* tells them that Vargo can teleport them back to their homes—and sets up a masterful plan of deceit. See area 6.25 for more information.

If the characters attack the *berbalang*, it fights back but flees as quickly as it can to alert Vargo. If Bunch ever faces the characters again, it uses its Spectral Duplicate feature to hide in a safe place while the duplicate fights.

#### AREA 6.14: SOUL TAP

As the characters approach this room, they hear a sudden scream that quickly fades away. If they wait in the hall, the pattern of sound repeats every six seconds.

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** Some great disaster has torn this chamber apart. Everything that remains has a crudely blocky appearance, as if shaped of thousands of black metal cubes. Huge rends in the metal walls expose massive steel girders and pipes whose blocky lengths are bent and twisted. Red steam spills out of the pipes, and red glowing bricks in the walls blink and flash erratically. The floor, once covered in square white tiles, is split open to an enormous hole opening up to darkness far below, and edged with blocky, twisted girders and pipes. Multicolored squares of tile cover the ceiling.

**Unpixelated.** The room looks much the same, though the twisted girders and pipes are revealed to be viciously jagged. The remnants of great machines stand along the edges of the room, likewise smashed beyond recognition. The tiles in the ceiling are a mosaic incorporating symbols of order, reincarnation, and rebirth. With a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check, a character recognizes ceremonial designs showing the Great Wheel that represents the position of the planes. Characters who can read Infernal or Primordial note sigils praising cosmic law and justice, and talking of how order must be obeyed even when it seems cruel or arbitrary.

**Long Way Down.** When the characters first enter this area, a pulse of light appears in the center of the room, directly below the Great Wheel image in the ceiling. Within the light, a naked humanoid appears in midair, then immediately screams as they plummet down the hole in the floor and vanish into darkness. A character near the edge who listens with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check hears the scream abruptly stop and a crunching sound from below.

Every six seconds, this spectacle repeats itself, with another figure appearing in the air and falling to their death. All are naked adults but vary in gender, race, and culture, including humans, gnomes, dwarves, the occasional goblinoid, and pale dwarves the characters

might recognize as *duergar*. All are doomed to die as they fall some 400 feet to area 6.39.

**Interrupted Fall.** The characters might attempt to rescue one or more of the falling individuals, using spells such as *feather fall* or *telekinesis*. Creatures saved from their fate are confused and have no idea where they are. All are lawful evil (or occasionally lawful neutral) individuals who died and have been reborn in new bodies resembling the ones they used to have. They know nothing about Acheron except what they might have heard in legends, and might be surprised to be told they’ve ended up there. Each creature has **veteran** statistics, adjusted for the lack of weapons and armor.

If the characters figure out a way to rescue large numbers of reborn souls (for example, by creating a solid structure to bridge the open center of the room), they discover to their peril that these humanoids all transform to pixelated **veterans** within 1 hour of wandering around the cube. If you don’t want to deal with the complication of hundreds of new guards joining the ranks of the skull lord’s servants, you might decide that the soul tap’s corrupted magic causes some or all of them to drop dead or vanish a few minutes after they appear.

**Souls on Tap.** A *detect magic* spell identifies powerful divine magic and transmutation in this area, centered in the pulsing light where the bodies appear. This room was the second most important site in Cube 1717 after the engine room: the place where the souls of lawful evil dead were reborn to be assigned new duties in area 6.13. When the *yugoloths* invaded the cube, they destroyed this area to shut off the flow of souls. But when the Six-Face Throne was activated, so was the soul tap. Only destroying the Heart Engine (see area 6.28) or a *wish* spell can turn it off now.

Characters who observe the damaged floor and walls see that they are slowly rebuilding themselves. If the characters are unable to destroy the Heart Engine before the floor of the room grows back in one week, it will once again provide the skull lord with an endless stream of new recruits.

**Climbing the Girders.** Descending the mangled girders and pipes is difficult and dangerous. Climbing the 200 feet between this area and area 6.32 requires four successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) checks (one for every 50 feet climbed). On a failed check, a character slips and falls, plummeting up to 400 feet to area 6.39 and taking 20d6 bludgeoning damage. A character who sees the area as pixelated has disadvantage on the check.

With each successful check, a character still takes 7 (2d6) slashing damage from the jagged metal along the descent path.

#### AREA 6.15: LADDER SHAFT

A 20-foot-wide shaft with ladders on all four sides runs some 200 feet between the upper and middle levels beneath face 6. When Cube 1717 was fully functional, magic in the shaft allowed freight and important individuals to levitate up and down, but that magic has failed.



### AREA 6.16: ACHERON'S ARMORY

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** This cavernous room is hotter than the corridors outside. Cubic steel terraces are stacked with blocky caricatures of weapons, while gleaming shields and armor are set on racks across the floor, all appearing as though forged of jagged cubes. The heat in the chamber comes from large furnaces venting pixelated smoke and flame. Blue and white glowing bricks in the walls and ceiling illuminate the room. Several small pixelated creatures wander near the furnaces.

**Unpixelated.** These chambers contain weapons and armor of all descriptions—enough to outfit an army, and all forged by duergar smiths or shaped by gnome crafters. Anvils, tongs, hammers, and other tools lie scattered about.

**Fiery Exits.** Numerous pipes extend from the furnaces to disappear into the walls where they lead to other areas. These pipes range from 2 feet to 5 feet across, with the largest pipes connecting to the Heart Engine at area 6.28. At your discretion, creatures with immunity to fire damage might be able to creep through the pipes into other areas.

**Arms and Armor.** The characters can claim any kind of nonmagical medium or heavy armor they want from this area (including hide armor made from the skin of Acheronian beasts), as well as nonmagical weapons of any type. Characters who spend some time searching the farthest corners of the chamber also find multiple examples of siege equipment (see chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*; size Huge or smaller only).

**Clockworks.** The gnomish clockworks that infest face 2 were made here by the mad derro architect Avnas and her pupils. Several of those constructs still crawl and rattle along near the forges: three **oaken bolters**<sup>M</sup>, ten **bronze scouts**<sup>M</sup>, and four **iron cobras**<sup>M</sup>, all pixelated.

The iron cobras and oaken bolters attack nonpixelated creatures on sight unless commanded not to by an intelligent pixelated creature. Unless they are attacked, the bronze scouts crawl within 5 feet of intruders, harmlessly sniff them, then wander off.

If the characters destroy all the clockworks here and return to the room later, another 1d6 + 1 pixelated **bronze scouts**<sup>M</sup> will have crawled out from hiding to behave as noted above.

Any noise of battle in this room is audible to creatures in area 6.19 or area 6.28.

### AREA 6.17: AVNAS'S LAIR

If they have not been encountered and killed already, there is a 50 percent chance that Avnas and her gray

render pet are in this area when the characters come here. They are otherwise wandering elsewhere in the cube, including on the surface (see "Random Surface Encounters").

The door to this area from area 6.16 is blocked by a heap of black, blue, and gray metallic cubes that make it appear as though the walls have collapsed. However, any character who inspects these cubes sees that they are not made of metal as they appear to be, but are simply heavy paper covered with metallic paint.

Moving the cubes reveals a 5-foot-wide circular iron hatch that resembles a smaller, handmade version of the huge doors on the cube's exterior. The door is unpixelated and has an unpixelated handprint lock at its center. Both the hatch and the lock are painted with wild arabesque designs and symbols of chaos.

Unlike the regular doors that open to the handprint of a lawful creature, this hatch opens only if the handprint of a chaotic creature (living or dead) is pressed into the lock. Alternatively, characters can batter their way through the hatch, which has AC 17, 30 hit points, and immunity to psychic and poison damage. However, doing so alerts Avnas and the gray render if they are here.

Beyond the door stands a comfortable, cluttered lair and workspace. Unlike the geometric corridors outside, the surfaces of this room are twisted into fabulous curves, ripples, and whorls. This area remains unpixelated as a result of the chaotic energy focused in Avnas's work. It is set with a four-poster bed whose soft mattress is stuffed with plump bat wings, a drafting table, numerous torture devices, comfortable armchairs and divans, a mirror, and a kitchen area where Avnas prepares and cooks homemade sausage. A pile of human, gnome, and duergar bones are the remains of the gray render's food. Several blobby cubical objects set around the place are the pixelated heads of dead enemies, which Avnas talks to as if they were alive.

**Avnas and Moxon.** This area is home to Avnas, the **derro savant**<sup>M</sup> who designed Cube 1717. She has the appearance of a scrawny, deformed dwarf of indeterminate age, with huge white eyes and a tangle of gray hair. On a chain around her neck, she wears the pixelated severed hand of a lawful hobgoblin, used to open the cube's doors. Avnas also carries a +1 *quarterstaff*, as well as numerous bags and pouches containing tinker's tools, jeweler's tools, mason's tools, smith's tools, polyhedral dice, and 850 gp worth of small gems. The derro is infected with the pixelating curse, picked up on one of her many trips outside this area. But she is just beginning to pixelate, with cubic growths visible on her hands and chin.

Avnas is accompanied everywhere by her huge, vicious pet Moxon—a **gray render**<sup>M</sup> that serves her



PIXELATED OAKEN BOLTER



PIXELATED  
IRON COBRA



faithfully and attacks anyone who threatens her. Moxon is fully pixelated.

**Works of Madness.** Formerly one of the few chaotic creatures in Acheron, Avnas's mechanical engineering skills quickly made her a prized servant of Earl Andromalius, who coveted her clockworks and machines. Earl Andromalius gifted the derro with a dread magic item called the *book of patterns* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix). The evil dreams bestowed upon the derro by that tome inspired the experiments that turned the quadrone into the Archquadrone and started the pixelating curse.

With the progression of the curse slowed in Avnas because of her chaotic nature, she survived the cataclysm that followed. By the time she emerged from her hiding place, Vargo had created the Six-Face Throne and taken control of the cube. Pledging allegiance at sword point to the skull lord, Avnas is nominally an ally of the "new earl." But she mostly wanders the cube in a state of awe, fascinated by the pixelating curse and the bodies, arms, and armor she has to experiment with.

Avnas is dangerously insane and constantly switches personality traits. Every time the characters meet her, roll a d6 and consult the following table to see how she acts.

**d6 Avnas's Personality**

- 1 The derro is completely obsessed with some piece of weapon, armor, or machinery. She ignores the characters, muttering to herself. If the characters persistently bother her, Moxon attacks them.
- 2 Avnas is homicidal and paranoid. Seeing the characters as her prey, she stalks and attacks them.
- 3 Convinced that the characters are undead slaves of the skull lord, Avnas rudely commands them to help her dig through bodies or perform some other menial task.
- 4 Avnas is mostly lucid, seeing the characters as threats but curious about how things have changed on the Material Plane since she came to Acheron. She asks about obscure figures of derro culture from thousands of years before. If the characters change the topic, she tries to misdirect them into the clutches of nearby pixelated guards, the balhannoth, or another enemy.
- 5 The derro scratches at the cubes on her face and hands, desperate as she asks the characters for help getting them off. If the characters cure her of the pixelating curse, roll a d6 again to determine her reaction. Thereafter, reroll this result if Avnas is free of the curse.
- 6 Avnas is unfailingly polite and enthusiastic. She answers any questions about Cube 1717 while eagerly engaging the characters in conversation about the wonders of the pixelating curse. (This personality results from the pixelating curse beginning to affect her brain. Reroll this result if Avnas is free of the curse.)

Along with the skull lord, Avnas is one of the only creatures in Cube 1717 who knows the whole story of what brought the cube to the material plane. However,

even she doesn't understand exactly how the dreams sent to her by the *book of patterns* transformed the quadrone and created the pixelating curse. She sees everything as an exciting new experiment, from torture to death to becoming a pixelated creature. Her sociopathic narcissism and self-destructive tendencies make it impossible for the derro to become a true ally of the characters, no matter what they might offer her.

**Drafting Table.** This metal table and the shelves around it are covered with rulers, styluses, and drafting equipment. A **stone defender**<sup>M</sup> stands near the table, inscribed with notes and sketches in Abyssal. Avnas uses the construct as a bulletin board, and it is programmed to attack anyone who goes near the drafting table. If Avnas is in the room, she can command the stone defender to attack intruders.

Canvas scrolls spread across the table show Avnas's architectural plans for the fortresses and barracks she was commissioned to make, as well as her dream projects—insane buildings combining the shapes of flowers, intestines, and seashells.

With a search of this area and a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, a character recognizes Avnas's plans for a huge cubic fortress as depicting the very fortress they are in. The plans show the overall layout of the fortress's faces (including the doors on each face, but not the threats currently found there). It shows all the rooms beneath each face, although not the names or contents of those rooms.

**Avnas's Dice Collection.** A set of shelves and a table in one corner of the room contain Avnas's treasures—shining, glowing polyhedral objects of all colors, shapes, and sizes, each with its faces marked by numeric symbols. Some are made of stone, others of metal or jewels. Some are sculpted of layered lizard skin. Some are ochre jellies magically kept at a low temperature to keep them solid. On the table stand dice towers, scales, and spiraling glass tubes used to test dice. The floor around the table is scrawled with invocations praising Demogorgon, Juiblex, and the other demon lords.

Avnas's collection of dice weighs 200 pounds in total. Most are merely curiosities, but any character who spends 30 minutes to sort through the collection identifies 50 pounds of valuable dice worth a total of 12,000 gp. The largest of these is a d12 carved from a petrified roc's egg.

Additionally, five unique dice are hidden among the rest:

**Eye Die:** When this translucent d4 is rolled as an action, the creature rolling it must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution save or have their face transform as their number of eyes changes to the number rolled on the die. A *remove curse* spell restores the creature's normal number of eyes, or they can reroll until they get the desired number. Additional eyes grant a creature no benefit.

**Skull Die:** This d6 is carved of demon bone and has a skull in place of the 1. When it is rolled as an action, a number of creatures within 60 feet (as determined by the roll) must each succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or take 35 (10d6) necrotic damage.



Creatures are affected in order from those with the lowest hit points to the highest.

*Dice Quasits:* An oversized dice cup on the table is covered by a stack of books. Inside the cup are three dice quasits (see the sidebar). When they hear the characters, they call out in wheedling, whiny voices to be released, promising to serve anyone who frees them.

#### AREA 6.18: AVNAS'S FORGE

Like area 6.17, this area remains unpixelated because of the chaotic clockwork energy it channels. This hot, poorly ventilated chamber contains a makeshift forge connected by pipes to the larger forge at area 6.16. The fire burns blue here due to the chemicals Avnas uses in her work. A creature with fire immunity might be able to creep through the pipes that connect the two forges.

A number of nonworking clockwork creations are scattered around the room, including constructs shaped of sword blades, corkscrews, and jagged drill bits; booby-trapped armor that lops off its wearer's head or explodes when a belt-buckle is pushed; and fragmented metal limbs that crawl around. If the characters search the room thoroughly, they awaken three **iron cobras**<sup>M</sup> that attack.

#### AREA 6.19: GUARDROOM

This area is identical to area 6.8, and contains three pixelated **merregons**<sup>M</sup> and three pixelated **veterans**.

#### AREA 6.20: GUARDROOM

This area is identical to area 6.8, and contains three pixelated **merregons**<sup>M</sup> and three pixelated **veterans**.

#### AREA 6.21: MORGUE

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** The room is cold, and the white glowing bricks in the wall glow dimly. Numerous long tables fill the area, and the walls are lined with large drawers, some open. Most of the tables are covered with blocky humanoid figures whose flesh is gray or yellow, and which is marked by irregular ridges, gaps, and holes. Similar figures lie in the drawers. In one corner of the room is a white tub 10 feet across. The tub is streaked with square scales of brown-gray slime, has a large grated drain, and features a crown of square gray pipes hanging from the ceiling above it. A faint smell of decay

#### DICE QUASIT

A rare variant among its demonic kind, a dice **quasit** can use its shapechanging ability to transform into what appears to be a large gaming die shaped of metal or stone. In this form, the dice quasit can see its surroundings, can speak, and can move by hopping or scuttling.

When rolled in its dice form, a dice quasit has a certain amount of control over the result of the roll. It is thus a perfect companion for a cheating gambler—especially as it does not radiate magic as enchanted dice would. A character using the dice quasit in a game has advantage on any ability checks made as part of the game. A dice quasit is always eager to serve a master—but it always attempts to corrupt that master, goading them into ever-greater acts of risk-taking, chaos, and evil.

#### STYX MIST

Vargo has deemed it advantageous for certain areas of the cube to not become pixelated. To accomplish this, the skull lord had Avnas set up a number of jury-rigged systems of pipes and pumps that constantly mist Styx water into the air.

In areas that are Styx misted, the pipes and pumps are noticeable where they run along the ceiling and walls, terminating in a large bucket of Styx water periodically refilled by pixelated guards. The Styx-water mist makes everything in an area damp and dripping. Pixelated creatures find the mist unpleasant but not harmful. Exposure to the mist is of no benefit to creatures under the effect of the pixelating curse, though the bucket of Styx water can be used to end the curse as normal.

fills the room except near the tub, which carries the scent of lye.

**Unpixelated.** The metal slabs and wall drawers of this morgue are mostly filled with human, hobgoblin, and duergar dead. Stripped of valuables and partially dissected, they number a hundred or more.

Every body in the room is an undead creature, culled from the endless supply of bodies at area 6.39 and raised by the skull lord using necromantic rituals. In total, forty-three pixelated **skeletons** and seventy-four pixelated **zombies** are here. Each has the following changes to its normal statistics:

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- It is immune to the frightened condition.
- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

The zombies and skeletons normally lie immobile until commanded to action by the skull lord. However, if the characters destroy more than six bodies, the rest of the undead all rise on the next round and attack. If Vargo is not present, the undead do not pursue characters out of the room.

**Acid Bath.** The tub is an automated body disposal device. Whenever an object is placed in the tub (or a creature steps into it), a deluge of acid pours down from the pipes above. This deals 21 (6d6) acid damage to the creature at the start of each of its turns. A dead body in the tub is dissolved and drained away to nothing in 2d4 rounds.

#### AREA 6.22: SURGERY

If he has not been encountered already, Sladek the pixelated **mage** is 50 percent likely to be found here, doing his own alchemical experiments or assisting with the skull lord's. See area 6.11B for more information on the mage.

This room of blue and green tile is kept damp and unpixelated by a Styx-water spraying device (see the "Styx Mist" sidebar).

Bright light fills this area from two *driftglobes* that hover in the center of the room, as well as glowing panels on the wall. Half the room is dominated by a surgical table. Around it, cabinets hold knives, scalpels, and other medical equipment. Sinks along one wall



produce a flow or shower of normal water. A closet contains surgical smocks, while another closet is filled with severed heads—victims of the skull lord’s surgeries. A third closet contains twenty vials of special acid that dissolves flesh but does not harm bone or brain tissue.

In one cabinet near the surgical area are Vargo’s notes, written in Infernal in two styles of handwriting (for two of its heads). Short and unembellished, the notes describe experiments designed to allow the skull lord to add new heads to its body—as well as speculation on the most effective means of determining a creature’s intelligence.

### AREA 6.23: LABORATORY

If he has not been encountered already, Sladek the pixelated **mage** is 50 percent likely to be in this room when the characters enter. See area 6.11B for more information on the mage.

This room is kept damp and unpixelated by a Styx-water spraying device (see the “Styx Mist” sidebar). The huge chamber is dominated by alchemical equipment: beakers, flasks and alembics, bubbling liquids, and strange slow-moving flames of various colors. Additionally, several glass-and-steel tanks hold living experiments—the horrible remnants of the fiendish work once carried out here. Breaking any of the tanks requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

**Green Slime.** If the glass is broken, all creatures within 5 feet of the tank must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be covered by a mass of green slime. More slime erupts out to cover an area 5 feet on a side at the center of the room. On initiative count 10 starting the following round, the slime spreads 5 feet horizontally and vertically until it covers an area 15 feet on a side. See “Dungeon Hazards” in chapter 5 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* for information on green slime.

**Ochre Jelly.** If the glass of its tank is shattered, this **ochre jelly** attacks.

**Oblex Spawn.** This tank is filled with red slime that constantly heaves and changes shape, sending forth limbs that melt back into the mass. If any character examines the slime for more than a few moments, it presses up against the glass as it forms a mushy caricature of that character’s face. If the glass is shattered, the slime is released as an **oblex spawn**<sup>M</sup>.

**Spiked Creature.** This tank contains a water dispenser and food dispenser similar to those in area 6.11. In the opposite corner is what appears to be an earthen lump of light brown pyramidal spikes, about the size of a small barrel.

If the characters approach the tank, the mass rises to its feet and presses itself against the glass nearest to them. It has a vaguely humanoid form with arms and legs, but no facial features or visible eyes—only perfectly triangular spikes. The unknown creature then scratches on the glass as it watches the characters walk around the room.

A *true seeing* spell reveals that the spike creature is a human infected by a disease developed in this laboratory—something similar to the pixelating curse. The creature desires humanoid contact though it cannot speak. A *dispel magic* or *cure disease* spell

returns it to normal, but the human is quite mad from being kept in this state for many years. If subject to a *greater restoration* spell, the character is cured and can communicate. Full immersion in the Styx sea also cures both the disease and the madness. If this unfortunate test subject is cured, who they are and how they came to be here is left for you to determine.

**Hand Creature.** This tank contains a water dispenser and food dispenser similar to those in area 6.11. Pacing back and forth in the tank is a pink creature with two arms and two legs whose body is covered with hands. The creature’s face, feet, elbows, shoulders, and thighs are festooned with hands, with no facial features visible.

As with the spiked creature, a *true seeing* spell reveals that this is a human subject of terrible experiments. The creature is completely lost in its own world, and it paces in circles even if its glass tank is broken. It can be cured of its affliction in the same manner as the spiked creature (see above). If cured, the unfortunate character’s origin and identity are left to you to determine.

### AREA 6.24: MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON

This room was used as a prison for creatures that had offended Earl Andromalius in some way. When the pixelating curse overtook Cube 1717, the pixelated soldiers released the prisoners here—including the skull lord, Vargo.

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** Numerous deep oubliettes are set into the floor throughout this room, whose unpleasant, glaring white light comes from glowing white bricks in the walls. The mouths of the oubliettes are blocked by cubic gray metal bars, most of which appear to be bent and damaged. Some of the bars are covered with a decorative mosaic pattern. A gray box connected to blocky pipes is attached to the wall between the doors.

**Unpixelated.** The gray metal box contains numerous wires, switches, and buttons that once opened and closed the barred doors of the oubliettes. The mosaic markings on the bars are Infernal inscriptions, noting the crimes for which prisoners were incarcerated. If the characters read all the writing on the bars, they discover Vargo the skull lord’s cell, whose bars read: “*CRIMES: Sedition, sedition, sedition • PUNISHMENTS: Decapitated and heads fused into one body; raised; 1 million life sentences.*”

**Empty Prison.** Characters looking inside the oubliettes see that they are 30 feet deep and note their foul scent. Pixelated chains hang from the walls 10 feet below the top of each pit, from which prisoners were once hung by their extremities.

In some cells, the bodies of prisoners still hang from the chains. In others, those bodies have rotted and fallen apart. Though the dead are pixelated, it’s clear that all were the unfortunate subjects of cruel magic experiments at the hands of Earl Andromalius.

### AREA 6.25: MIDDLE-LEVEL BARRACKS

This area is identical to area 6.11, set up as an open space lined with multiple layers of cell-like rooms once



inhabited by the cube's Acheronian soldiers. Some of the cells contain minor personal items that once belonged to the dead, but nothing else of interest. (Vargo doesn't yet have enough soldiers to need this level of the barracks).

**Welcome Home.** If the skull lord becomes aware of the characters' presence in the cube but the situation doesn't immediately turn into a fight, it uses this area as a prison to hold the intruders (see "The Skull Lord's Plan")—but with a dark twist. Using the authority over all pixelated creatures that comes from being attuned to the Six-Face Throne, the skull lord commands the balhannoth and the adult oblex (see face 5 and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for information on those creatures). Using its telepathic and reality-warping powers, the balhannoth turns this area into an exact duplicate of a real place one of the characters most wants to be: their hometown, their favorite tavern, the port town they were in before they came to the island, or even some place of respite the character has only ever dreamed of visiting.

To carry out this plan, the skull lord or one of its allies (most likely Bunch the berbalang or Sladek the pixelated mage) engages the characters in negotiations or distracting small talk for the 10 minutes

it takes for the balhannoth to transform the area. The characters are then told that a dimensional portal in the cube can take them home, whereupon they are led to area 6.25. As soon as they pass through the doorway into this area, that doorway disappears behind them.

Everything in the new environment appears to be real. Moreover, the characters are also greeted by up to 1d4 + 1 people or creatures that seem to belong at the new location—all of them manifested by the oblex. If the area would normally have a larger group of people, they are unexpectedly absent or show up later, but no more than two to five other creatures are ever seen at the same time.

In reality, the characters remain in the barracks as transformed by the balhannoth. The skull lord simply wants them to waste time figuring out how to get out of this false environment while the pixelating curse overcomes them.

Among the many things likely to give away the false nature of this homecoming, any object created by the balhannoth is clearly a fake. Books turn out to be filled with blank paper, mechanical devices are crude, nonfunctioning duplicates, gold and jewels turn out to be made of paste or tin, and so forth. Characters who move to the edge of the area also quickly discover that it has fixed boundaries, as the balhannoth has reshaped the barracks' existing walls to hem them in.

The faint sulfur smell of the oblex can also be noted around any of its simulacra with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. Because the oblex has no knowledge of NPCs known to the characters, the absence of such NPCs at the false location is also a giveaway.

If the characters attack the simulacra or discover the balhannoth where it hides within some feature of the false location, both the balhannoth and the oblex attack at once and summon nearby pixelated guards to aid them.

If one or more characters reach mental level 3 of the pixelating curse while in this area, the balhannoth telepathically fills them in on the plan. Players of those characters can be encouraged to secretly roleplay this development, joining in on deceiving the other characters and keeping them in the false location while the pixelating curse runs its course.

#### AREA 6.26: TREASURY

The 20-foot-tall door to this room is inscribed with a carving of the five heads of Tiamat, still recognizable despite their pixelation. The door is locked, and features a large keyhole covered with pixelated dragon designs. A *glyph of warding* inscribed upon the door by the skull lord can be noted only with a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check. It triggers a *finger of death* spell (save DC 18) upon any creature except the skull lord that touches the door.

The door opens only to a key the skull lord wears around its neck, but it can be picked with a successful DC 30 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. It can also be attacked (it has the same statistics as the exterior doors of the cube).



PIXELATED OBLEX  
AND SIMULACRUM



Beyond the door, the features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** This chamber is filled with heaps of yellow and silver blocks, as well as scale-like flat squares that shine in the light of glowing white sticks. Barrel-shaped white objects hold more blocks, transparent and shining in blue, green, and violet. Blocky caricatures of weapons, shields, armor, and helmets hang against the walls or are stacked in heaps. A pixelated haze hangs in the air, emanating from glowing cubes in a blocky red brazier.

**Unpixelated.** The room is filled with piles of coins, urns holding colorful gleaming gems, strange armor, and weapons. Smoke pours from red coals in a squat brazier in the form of a devil's head, which appears to be carved from a single red gem. Numerous white candles fill the room with light.

**Poor Welcome.** Any unfortunate thieves exploring the treasury must immediately contend with the fact that the entire room is filled with poison gas from the incense in the devilish brazier. Any creature that starts its turn in the room must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 21 (6d6) poison damage and become poisoned until it leaves the room. A creature that holds its breath gets no benefit against the poison. If the door to area 6.28 is left open, the poison gas dissipates after 10 minutes.

Once the property of a great lord of Acheron, the treasury contains ancient riches from dozens of forgotten empires. The heaps of coins total 35,000 gp, 120,000 sp, and 42,000 cp. Several marble urns are completely filled with gems—mostly star sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and blue spinels—totaling 170 pounds and 108,000 gp in value. (A character who spends an action to scoop up a handful from any urn gathers gems worth  $1d4 \times 1,000$  gp.) The devil brazier is carved from a single gigantic piece of rose quartz. It weighs 500 pounds and is worth 15,000 gp.

The finely decorated arms and armor include *+1 chain mail*, *chain mail of resistance (necrotic)*, *scale mail mariner's armor*, *+1 plate mail*, a *sentinel shield*, a *vicious longsword*, a *+2 longsword*, a *+2 spear*, a *greatsword of vengeance*, a *horn of Valhalla (bronze)*, and a *helm of teleportation*. These magic items are scattered among many nonmagical items of the same kind, and are easily spotted when the mundane items are seen in their pixelated state.

Each of the ten white candles in the room has a *continual flame* spell cast upon it.

### AREA 6.27: LADDER SHAFT

A 20-foot-wide shaft with ladders on all four sides runs some 200 feet between the middle and lower levels beneath face 6. When Cube 1717 was fully functional, magic in the shaft allowed freight and important individuals to levitate up and down, but that magic has failed.

Two pixelated **veterans** stand beside the ladders, guarding this shaft from potential intruders. If they see any nonpixelated creatures climbing up from below

or in area 6.28, they telepathically alert the guards in area 6.19.

### AREA 6.28: CONTROL ROOM

The beating of the Archquadrone's heart can be heard in the corridors leading up to this chamber, and is loud within.

The pixelating curse is stronger here than in the rest of the cube. While in area 6.28, creatures must make all checks and saving throws related to the curse every 10 minutes, rather than at the end of each short rest. The appearance of this chamber also cannot be unpixelated, even with Styx water, *pixel glasses*, or other magic.

This vast square chamber lies at the exact center of the cube. Pipes, valves, and gears cover the riveted iron walls here, occasionally moving, pumping, or hissing as they release strange-smelling steam. Red lights glow from red bricks on the wall. The room is totally pixelated and has no curved surfaces.

The skeletal remains of the Archquadrone fill the center of the room. They resemble little more than a 60-foot-wide dilapidated square framework of what looks like rotting sheet metal, and which shows only hints of the Archquadrone's face and empty eye sockets. Clearly visible through the vast rents in the Archquadrone's remains is the 10-foot-wide Heart Engine, which pumps at the center of the floor. The engine is perched over a wide pit that is bridged by pipes thick enough to walk upon. The pipes go everywhere, disappearing into the walls and floor.

A short flight of metal steps leads 10 feet above the Heart Engine to a metal platform. Two pieces of bulbous machinery squat there, with a large glowing cube floating between them. On the other side of the platform is a large panel of buttons, switches, and levers. A strange piece of furniture at the center of the platform resembles six chairs in a circle sitting back to back, with a crown of piping above them. This is the Six-Face Throne.

**The Archquadrone's Remains.** Little is left of the Archquadrone except for its heart and the shell of its skull. A character who saw the statue in area 6.12 recognizes it as the same creature. The remains can be confirmed as belonging to an enormously large and limbless quadrone with a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

The Archquadrone's body can be damaged by any attack, but it's already dead. The Heart Engine must be attacked directly. However, a creature that touches any part of the remains and uses *detect thoughts*, *speak with dead*, telepathy, or a similar effect receives fragmentary images of the life of the Archquadrone and its desire to reshape the universe in its own image.

**Heart Engine.** This huge, crystalline cluster of square valves and pixelated pipes continually pulses and moves, and radiates palpable heat and a red glow. Black metal pipes ranging in size from 2 feet to 5 feet across emerge from the Heart Engine to enter the Six-Face Throne and the walls all around it. The engine is encircled by what appears to be a ring of shining gray-black metal, which also pulses in time with the beating of the heart.





PIXELATED STEEL PREDATOR

The Heart Engine is the nexus of the pixelating curse. Any creature that touches it with its bare flesh suffers the pixelating curse at an accelerated rate thereafter. That creature rolls to avoid infection, goes up another physical level, and rolls to avoid increasing their mental level of the curse every minute.

If the Heart Engine is destroyed, the pixelating curse is immediately dispelled and all the other parts of the cube become nonfunctional. The Heart Engine has AC 18; 180 hit points; immunity to poison damage; immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage from nonmagical attacks not made with adamantite weapons; and resistance to cold and fire damage. When damaged, it spills black pixelated blood, and all pixelated creatures and creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne that are on or in the cube understand that the Heart Engine is in danger.

**Predatory Defender.** The ring of shining gray-black metal is actually the foremost defender of the Heart Engine: a pixelated **steel predator**<sup>™</sup> with these changes:

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- It is immune to the frightened condition.

- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

The pixelated steel predator's mission is to guard area 6.28. If any creature threatens or attacks the Heart Engine, the Six-Face Throne, or any of the other controls in this area, it uncurls its panther-like body from around the heart and attacks until it or its foes are destroyed. It will even attack the skull lord and other creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne if they attempt to damage it or the Heart Engine for some reason. The steel predator does not leave area 6.28 under any circumstances.

**Going Down.** Below and around the heart is a pit partially filled with the pipe-like 'guts' of the Archquadrone, and which slopes down into the slippery shape beneath it. A creature that enters this tight, red-lit space can crawl down into area 6.47, the exhaust shaft of the cube. However, this route is slippery with oil, and a creature must succeed on a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to hold on as they climb. On a failed check, the creature slides out of control down toward area 6.47, and must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw to grab onto the edge of the pit with their hands. On a failed save, the creature falls 300 feet down to the foul waters of area 1.1, taking 20d6 bludgeoning damage.

**The Six-Face Throne.** Resembling six throne-like chairs in a hexagonal shape stacked back to back, these six linked seats sit at the center of what used to be the Archquadrone's skull. Sitting just above the chairs is a crown-like nest of pixelated pipes and wires. If any creature climbs the steps to the Six-Face Throne unaccompanied by the skull lord, the pixelated steel predator uncoils itself from the Heart Engine and attacks.

The Six-Face Throne has AC 18; 90 hit points; immunity to poison damage; bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage from nonmagical attacks not made with adamantite weapons; and resistance to cold and fire damage. Even if the throne is destroyed, creatures attuned to it remain so attuned as long as the Heart Engine survives, and can continue to control the cube. However, no new creatures can attune to the throne and gain control over the cube until the throne is rebuilt by the skull lord over a week's time.

Created by Vargo, the Six-Face Throne allows up to six creatures to take control of the cube systems once controlled by the dead Archquadrone. A number of pixelated suction cups hang down from the tangle above on heavy wires, each just the right size to be attached to a humanoid head.

If a creature presses the suction cup against its head, what happens next depends on its Intelligence. A creature with an Intelligence of 14 or higher automatically becomes attuned to the Six-Face Throne (see below), after which the suction cup detaches. A creature with an Intelligence of 10 to 13 is unable to interface with the throne, and instead takes 7 (2d6) psychic damage. A creature with an Intelligence of



9 or less literally hurts the throne with its stupidity, triggering an explosion that deals 21 (6d6) psychic damage and 21 (6d6) thunder damage to that creature and each other creature within a 30-foot radius. Any creature aside from the triggering creature can attempt a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, reducing the damage by half on a success. Any pixelated creature that takes damage from this explosion are stunned for 1d3 rounds.

**Attuning to the Six-Face Throne.** A creature that becomes attuned to the Six-Face Throne gains access to various powers, which it understands instinctively:

- It can communicate by telepathy with other attuned creatures at any range.
- It can use the gravity controls (see below) while in area 6.28.
- It can use the scrying mosaics (see below) if it is anywhere within the cube.
- It can use the cannon controls (see below) while in area 6.28 if five or more faces of the cube have been activated.
- All pixelated creatures obey its commands, unless those orders contradict with the creatures' desire to protect the Six-Face Throne and the Heart Engine. If different attuned creatures give conflicting orders to a pixelated creature, that creature obeys whichever order is in the majority. If there is no majority, the pixelated creature takes no action, unable to decide.

It's impossible to become attuned more than once to the throne. If an attuned creature tries to do so again, it takes 14 (4d6) psychic damage.

Between the skull lord's two intelligent heads and Sladek the pixelated mage, there are three creatures attuned to the cube when the characters begin the adventure. If one or more characters attune themselves to the Six-Face Throne while Sladek and the skull lord are alive, the Heart Engine starts to beat stronger and faster, and the cube's powers increase. See the "Awakening the Cube" sidebar.

**Gravity Controls.** The glowing cube that levitates on the platform near the Six-Face Throne is covered with symbols. Pixelated lightning shoots back and forth between the bulbous machines, surrounding the floating cube with a halo of crackling red energy.

The gravity control cube can be touched and manipulated easily by any creature attuned to the Six-Face Throne. Any other creature that tries to touch it must make a DC 18 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 28 (8d6) lightning damage and is unable to touch the cube that round. On a success, the creature takes 14 (4d6) lightning damage but can touch the cube.

Each face of the control cube is numbered from 1 to 6, corresponding to one of the six faces of Cube 1717. The face of the cube that is up corresponds to the face that is up and above the water on the Material Plane. As an action, a creature can gently turn the control cube in midair so that a different face is up. This causes a great rumbling and hissing of steam in this area that lasts for 1 minute while the cube 'rolls' outside, but that movement goes unnoticed inside.

## AWAKENING THE CUBE

Vargo's ultimate goal is to awaken the full functionality of Cube 1717. The cube's powers are dependent on the number of active faces of the Six-Face Throne. Each effect is cumulative if one or more faces are active.

**No Faces Active.** All the interior lights in the cube go out. The only places with light are the forges in areas 6.16 and 6.18, and wherever fitful fires burst forth from broken pipes from time to time. The cube stops producing its own internal gravity and the local gravity of each of the faces, so that all areas conform to the prevailing gravity of the world outside. The pixelating curse stops spreading, although all currently pixelated creatures and areas remain pixelated as long as the Heart Engine survives. The damaged soul tap (area 6.14) stops producing its endless flow of bodies. The cube sinks to the bottom of the Sea of Swords, and the forge fires eventually go out.

**One Face.** Lighting and local gravity functions in the cube. The soul tap produces bodies as noted in the adventure.

**Two Faces.** The cube gains partial vertical propulsive power, allowing it to rise to the surface of the water for up to 4 hours each day.

**Three Faces.** As at the start of the adventure, the cube has increased vertical propulsive power, allowing it to stay at the surface of the water. It can also sink underwater if the controllers of the Six-Face Throne want it to.

**Four Faces.** The cube gains the ability to move vertically up or down at a rate of 60 feet per round. If Vargo is in control of the cube, the skull lord causes it to rise out of the water, allowing the *handkerchief of darkness* to be grabbed and ending the fog. Freed from the Styx sea, all the faces of the cube rapidly pixelate.

**Five Faces.** The cube's main cannon (extending from area 6.28A to area 5.5) powers up. A creature that is attuned to and sitting in the Six-Face Throne can use the controls to fire the cannon as an action. Doing so has the effect of a *meteor swarm* spell that can be aimed at any points within 1 mile of the exterior of the cube. Additionally, all creatures and objects caught in the area of the cannon's four fiery orbs automatically contract the pixelating curse. Each time the cannon is fired, all creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne suffer one level of exhaustion.

**Six Faces.** The cube gains horizontal as well as vertical movement ability, flying at a rate of 60 feet per round. At this point, it is free to go anywhere in Faerûn.

The gravity control cube has AC 17; 30 hit points; and immunity to cold, fire, poison, lightning, and necrotic damage. If the control cube is destroyed, Cube 1717 stops producing its own internal gravity and the local gravity of each of the faces, so that all areas conform to the prevailing gravity of the world outside. The cube also stops moving and rolling, forcing creatures to exit it through the face that is currently above the water. A new control cube self-generates in one day.

**Scrying Mosaics.** Along each of the walls of this chamber at a height of 10 feet, as well as on the ceiling directly above the Six-Face Throne, a 20-foot-wide rectangular mosaic appears to show flat, square stones of gray, white, and black. Occasionally, the color of the stones changes, with white becoming black and vice versa in random patterns.



The five mosaics are magical, and serve as scrying mirrors. When a creature attuned to the Six-Face Throne is in this room, they can use a bonus action to cause the mosaics to display a pixelated image of the world outside the cube. The five mosaics show a color panoramic view of the exterior of the cube as seen from faces 2 to 5. Creatures and objects upon those faces appear as if they were semi-transparent, allowing an attuned creature to see creatures walking on the cube while also seeing through them to the landscape beyond. The only direction that cannot be seen is the bottom of the cube (face 1).

The scrying has no visible effect on the exterior of the cube, and creatures on faces 2 to 5 have no idea they are being scried on. The scrying effect ends when the creature that activated it leaves area 6.28. The scrying doesn't show any of the interior rooms or tunnels of the cube.

When a creature attuned to the Six-Face Throne is not in this area, it can use a bonus action to send its consciousness into the mosaic and see into the control room. The creature's head appears in color in one of the five mosaics, and it can see from that mosaic's perspective while not losing any awareness of its own surroundings. The creature can also hear whatever is happening in the room, and can speak to creatures in the room in a supernaturally loud, booming voice. If multiple creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne attempt this at the same time, their heads appear in separate mosaics.

**Cannon Controls.** This elaborate apparatus of buttons, switches and levers can be reached from one of the six chairs of the Six-Face Throne. Pipes run into the wall from the apparatus, pushing past other pipes and pistons before reaching area 6.28A. Metal tubes from the Heart Engine also converge on the opening. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana or History) check identifies the cannon controls as belonging to some kind of magical siege engine.

The entrance leading to area 6.28A initially appears to be jammed shut with pixelated pipes and cables. A Small creature can sneak through to area 6.28A with a successful DC 25 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

The cannon is nonfunctional until five faces of the Six-Face Throne are activated (see the "Awakening the Cube" sidebar).

### AREA 6.28A. CANNON SHAFT

This round, pixelated metal shaft leads some 250 feet toward face 5, gradually widening from 2 feet in diameter to 20 feet at area 5.5. The walls of the shaft are warm and hum with energy. Tiny maintenance shafts, grates, and pipes along the way vent heat and occasional harmless electrical discharges.

As it reaches area 5.5, the shaft ends at an interior door (see that area's description). Anyone approaching the door from area 6.28 becomes aware of an increasing stench of decay and rotten meat.

If the cannon is fired, the interior and exterior doors at area 5.5 open and a violet light begins to build in intensity at the bottom of the shaft. Any creatures in area 6.28A or area 5.5 are killed the next round as

the cannon shaft is flooded with enough energy to destroy a castle.

### AREA 6.29: LIBRARY

This room of black onyx pillars and arches is not pixelated, thanks to a constant spray of Styx water (see the "Styx Mist" sidebar).

The library is lined with stone shelves, making it one of the few rooms in the cube not entirely made of metal. Glowing wall panels provide dim light, and three *driftglobes* provide additional illumination as they float through the stacks. Several stone tables and chairs provide places to sit and read.

The shelves are covered with books and scrolls—many suffering damage from the dripping mist. The majority of the scrolls are in Infernal, with others in Common, Dwarvish, or rare and forgotten languages of the Material Plane. Most of the books are of six types:

- Histories of the great military battles of forgotten empires
- Descriptions of armor and weapons
- Lists of names of the dead
- Tedious legal texts describing the many laws of Acheron and the gruesome punishments for breaking them
- Transcribed court proceedings from legal cases in Acheron, including the gruesome punishments decreed by infernal judges
- Hymns to Bane, god of tyrants

Several stacks of books have been pulled from the shelves by the skull lord, and now rest in puddles on the tables. Among them are four reference books on multiple-headed creatures, from the hydra to the chimera to the ettin. There are also eight tomes on mechanical and electrical engineering, two books discussing the River Styx and its effects, five books on brain surgery, and four books on the history of Faerûn's Sword Coast. These last titles were written centuries ago and are completely outdated.

One cabinet between the main doors contains ink, quill pens, blank paper, and writing implements, and has two shelves stacked with games. A character who searches the game shelf finds dice, several damp decks of cards (including Three Dragon Ante), a fine chess set (120 gp), a fine backgammon set (180 gp), a checkers-like game played with small opals (worth 1,000 gp), and several more-obscure games. The skull lord might use games to test the intelligence of the characters (see "The Skull Lord's Plan").

Any character who can read Infernal and who spends 1 hour searching the library for interesting books discovers four *spell scrolls* tucked away in the stacks—*creation*, *detect thoughts*, *fly*, and *Otiluke's resilient sphere*.

If a character specifically searches the library for secret doors, a successful DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check discovers a sliding bookshelf that leads to area 6.30.

### AREA 6.30: SECRET LIBRARY

This dimly lit room contains the library's most precious books. All have been pixelated, as even the skull lord



isn't aware of this place. (Avnas is now the only person who knows about it.)

While the characters initially explore this room, they begin to hear strange whispers coming from all around them. If they do not leave immediately, 1d4 + 1 **allips** emerge from the walls and attack, formed out of the evil lore of this vile place. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for information on the allip.)

If the books in this area are viewed unpixelated, most are revealed as bizarre poetry, secret plans for military battles in Acheron, or fiendish spellbooks. (You can determine the contents of these books if any wizard characters are interested in them.) An especially large stack of books offers up all the gory details of the tortures inflicted on prisoners of war and disobedient soldiers in the laboratory at area 6.23 and the torture chamber at area 6.43.

Two particularly old and heavy books are set on two pedestals at the center of the room. One is a *tome of clear thought*. The other is the *book of patterns* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix).

### AREA 6.31: VARGO'S CHAMBER

If it has not been encountered already, Vargo the **skull lord**<sup>M</sup> is 50 percent likely to be in this room when the characters enter. Vargo is always accompanied by its bodyguards—a pixelated **merregon**<sup>M</sup> and a pixelated **shadar-kai shadow dancer**<sup>M</sup>—that defend their lord to the death. But the skull lord's shadar-kai servant is someone the characters might be looking for (see "The Missing Shadar-kai," below).

The steel door to this room is unpixelated, and is inscribed with a carving of three skulls. The door opens only to a key the skull lord wears around its neck, but it can be picked with a successful DC 30 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, or it can be broken down. The door has AC 18, 30 hit points, a damage threshold of 5, immunity to psychic and poison damage, and resistance to cold and fire damage.

Beyond the door is a sumptuous room which is not pixelated, thanks to a constant spray of Styx water (see the "Styx Mist" sidebar). This area is noticeably colder than the corridor outside. The room is lit by a combination of ghostly glowing worms that crawl out of the furniture, a dusty candelabra with candles made of eyeballs glued together, and red glowing panels in the walls.

The walls here are lined with black curtains. In the center of the room is a large black steel sarcophagus lined with red velvet. The rest of the room is divided into three parts, each featuring the same furniture: plush high-backed chairs, kingly tables, and fine cabinets and wardrobes. However, all these fine furnishings have been so damaged by the damp as to be worthless.

The three tables are each set with three silver cups (a total of nine cups, 75 gp each). Each of the three sections of the room also has a wine rack loaded with twenty bottles of rich wine (sixty bottles, 90 gp each). In a wineskin hidden among one of the sets of bottles is six doses of torpor poison (see chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). It can be found with a successful DC

15 Wisdom (Perception) check, or by any character who takes all the bottles.

At the bottom of the sarcophagus, visible to any character who searches the steel coffin, is a musty *spell scroll of dimension door*.

One of the three sections of the room contains a glass case with the partially pixelated rotting head of a hideous devilish creature—the dead Earl Andromalius.

**Best Two out of Three.** When the characters first enter Cube 1717, only two of Vargo's three heads are fully active and aware. The third head babbles and chatters idiotically, when not sucking from a straw attached to a flask tied around its neck. Each of the skull lords' other two heads has a key tied around its neck—to the treasury (area 6.26) and this area. The flask the third head drinks from is filled with Styx water, keeping the skull lord safe from the pixelating curse.

Vargo was once three evil adventurers who teamed up to defeat the devil Earl Andromalius. When they were defeated, Andromalius subjected them to a horrific curse, combining the three of them into a single undead being. At first, the three heads hated being bound together, but over hundreds of years in Andromalius's prison, they gradually developed something like a group mind. When the cube was overtaken by the pixelating curse, Vargo managed to remain uninfected and gain its freedom.

Vargo's unique ability to deal with the curse stems from the skull lord's unique makeup. The Styx water absorbed by Vargo's undead body is strong enough to protect the skull lord from pixelating, but only the head that actually drinks the water is subject to its mental effects. With two heads still functioning, Vargo has survived the chaos with its wits intact, and was able to develop the Six-Face Throne as a way to control creatures pixelated by the curse. Vargo's two conscious heads became the Throne's two initial controllers. Sladek the pixelated mage became the third.

**Fighting the Skull Lord.** With only two heads active, Vargo is slightly weaker than normal. It has the statistics of a **skull lord**<sup>M</sup> with these changes:

- It cannot cast 7th-level spells.
- It has only two legendary actions.

Vargo has also claimed the *Ioun stones* once owned by the wizard Sladek, which grant it additional features:

- It cannot be surprised.
- Its Intelligence is 18.
- Its Wisdom is 17.
- Its proficiency bonus is increased by 1.
- It has a +1 bonus to AC.
- It can cast *fear* once without expending a spell slot.

See "Ioun Stones" earlier in the adventure and chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for more information on Vargo's *Ioun stones*.

Vargo is a cunning, charismatic opponent who commands the absolute obedience of all the pixelated creatures on the cube. If the characters attack the skull lord, it musters all available pixelated creatures to its defense. But if possible, it tries to parley with the characters in the hope of them letting down their



guard. The skull lord tries to gauge the intelligence of each of the characters, and keeps a special eye out for wizards. See “The Skull Lord’s Plan” earlier in the adventure for more information about Vargo’s tactics and endgame.

**The Missing Shadar-kai.** Though Astilbe in her pixelated form looks very much like any of the other humanoid pixelated guards, characters can note her shadowy coloration and the spiked chain she wields in combat. If Fern is present, she recognizes her friend at once, calling out and pleading with her to surrender. This takes Astilbe out of the fight. If Astilbe is unpixelated at any point, she regains her original alignment and statistics, and both she and Fern fight alongside the characters.

As a pixelated **shadar-kai shadow dancer**<sup>M</sup>, Astilbe has the following changes:

- Her alignment is lawful neutral.
- She has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- She is immune to the frightened condition.
- She has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

### AREA 6.32: BROKEN AREA

As the characters approach this area, they hear a scream that rises and quickly falls. If they wait in the hall, the pattern of sound repeats every six seconds. When the characters can see into this area, they observe that every six seconds, a naked humanoid appears from above them and plummets down into the darkness below. See area 6.14 for more information.

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** The walls, ceiling and floor are smashed open here, forming a great tear through which pixelated pipes and gigantic steel girders are visible.

**Unpixelated.** The shattered girders, pipes, and floor reveal the deadly sharpness of their edges.

**Climbing the Girders.** Navigating the mangled girders and pipes is difficult and dangerous. Climbing the 200 feet between this area and area 6.14 or area 6.39 requires four successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) checks (one for each 50 feet climbed). On a failed check, a character slips and falls, plummeting to area 6.39 and taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage for each 10 feet fallen (maximum 20d6). A character who sees the area as pixelated has disadvantage on the check.

### NEARING THE END

The lowest level beneath face 6 is darker and dingier than the two levels above. The rumbling of the cube’s engines is loud in all areas here, and the pixelated walls are marred by rust-colored stains.

The temples and side rooms on this level are filthy with cubic debris—ash, broken metal, mud and dirt—and the decomposing pixelated bodies of soldiers. Only the wide main hallway that runs around the outside of the lower level is relatively clear of bodies and rubble, as it is swept clean by the hellfire engine (see area 6.41).

With each successful check, a character still takes 7 (2d6) slashing damage from the jagged metal along the descent path.

### AREA 6.33: EMPTY GUARDROOMS

These rooms are identical to area 6.8, but no guards are present here unless you wish to increase the ranks of the skull lord’s followers.

### AREA 6.33A. GRAVITY JUNCTION/ GUARDROOM

This room is identical to area 6.8, except it features no guards and has two passages that lead to interior doors, then to area 4.2 and area 5.3 beyond.

### AREA 6.34: DAMAGED CORRIDOR

A great explosion has collapsed this corridor, melting and breaking its steel walls and the girders behind them. The walls are blackened and discolored. Everything is pixelated, and great heaps of metal cubes fill the collapsed area.

Like a living body, the cube is slowly regenerating this area. If the characters rest here or try to remove the rubble, they see that the rubble is gradually clearing itself, oozing back into the walls in great cubical clots. It takes three days from when the characters first enter the cube for a corridor to completely repair itself.

In places, the pixelated pipes and tubes behind the walls are exposed and smashed to reveal a black pixelated liquid dripping out—something uncomfortably similar to both oil and blood. Any character who presses their ear to the wall can hear the engines in the cube pulsing in a steady rhythm—matching the beating of the Archquadrone’s heart.

### AREA 6.35: STYX PUDDLES

The rigid right angles and cubic forms of this level are interrupted in areas where the metal walls are bent and broken. In the center of each of these twisted areas is a pool of murky black Styx water, 1 to 3 feet deep. When the cube first fell to the Material Plane, numerous sections were still flooded with Styx water. As the cube regenerated, most of that water was pumped out through area 6.47, but these last few pools remain.

Pixelated creatures do not pursue characters into the pools. A character who wades through the Styx water feels a chill as their memories begin to fade, but is at no risk of suffering the water’s mental effects. A creature immersed in the water must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw or lose their memories (see “The Styx Sea”). Creatures suffering the pixelating curse aren’t cured by exposure to the water unless they fully immerse themselves.

### AREA 6.36: ANTECHAMBER OF THE GREAT TEMPLE OF TIAMAT.

This area is dark, except for a red flickering light shining from area 6.38. The features of the area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** This tall-ceilinged room is decorated with huge pixelated relief carvings in red and black stone, showing creatures with wings. Eight oubliettes around



the room consist of 10-foot-deep pits covered with square steel grates, and are heavy with the scent of rot. Two tall, pixelated archways lead out of the room.

**Unpixelated.** The reliefs can be identified as black and red dragons, carved in red marble and basalt. The bases of all the statues are engraved in Draconic with hymns to Tiamat.

**Place of Sacrifice.** When the cube was a functional fortress, the eight oubliettes were used to store sacrifices and food for the abishai priests of Tiamat who controlled this temple. The sacrifice pits contain sand and bits of humanoid remains.

When the pixelating curse overcame the fortress, the temple of Tiamat remained untainted through the power of the dragon queen. This antechamber was too far from the center of that power to have been affected, but midway along the corridor to area 6.38, the walls and floor unpixelate, gradually changing from a blocky mosaic to natural black granite.

### AREA 6.37: PRIESTS' BARRACKS

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** A central corridor opens up between numerous black metal doors set with small, square-barred windows. Most windows reveal small rooms beyond that contain a number of indistinct, blocky objects, but a few rooms are empty and finished in white tile. Several blocky machines stand in the main area, which is lit by white glowing bricks in the walls. A number of crudely humanoid, cubic bodies of black and gray are spread across the floor with mosaic-like black stains spilling out around them. The area smells of rot.

**Unpixelated.** These were meditation chambers and personal quarters for priests of Bane and Loviatar. Each individual room contains a low table, a simple toilet and sink, and personal items such as priestly robes, maces, and holy symbols. The white-tiled chamber is a slime shower and the machines are food devices, all similar to those seen in area 6.11. The doors to individual rooms have no locks.

The rotting remains of the dead priests, killed in the assault on the cube, lie on the floor in pools of dried blood.

### AREA 6.38: GREAT TEMPLE OF TIAMAT

This chamber was the temple of Tiamat, one of the gods worshiped by the soldiers and lords of the cube. Thanks to the power of the holy idol here, the temple was able to resist the pixelating curse that has swallowed all other areas of the cube.

Entering this area reveals a vault-like chamber walled in black granite, whose ceiling rises out of sight 100 feet overhead. Human skulls glowing with the light of *continual flame* spells are set on pedestals across the room and hang from the walls to fill the area with bright light.

In the center of the room stands a great brass pool filled with burning oil. At the far end of the chamber is a large bloodstained obsidian statue of Tiamat—a



BLACK ABISHAI

monstrous dragon with five heads whose eyes are glittering gems. A number of items are set at the base of the statue, along with piles of glittering coins. A smell of burned meat and incense fills the air.

**Abishai Assault.** The temple's most powerful priests survived the assault on the cube: seven **white abishai**<sup>M</sup> and one **black abishai**<sup>M</sup>. Not allied in any way with the skull lord, these infernal dragons have been seeking a way to escape the cube since the assault, along with sacrifices to Tiamat for protecting them from the pixelating curse. When not scouting the cube for these things, they rest here.

If the characters entered area 6.36 with any light or noise, the abishai flew up to cling to the ceiling. When they party enters this area, they attack with surprise.

**Relics and Retribution.** In their explorations of the cube, the abishai have gathered treasure and left it as offerings at the foot of the idol: 2,250 gp, 752 sp, and a *tentacle rod* left behind by a fallen drow.

The idol of Tiamat radiates powerful magic and evil. If the abishai kill a creature, they drain its blood onto the idol while singing hymns to Tiamat, then consume the sacrifice. The idol's gem eyes are worth 2,000 gp each (for a total of 20,000 gp). However, any attempt to remove the eyes or otherwise damage the statue causes an **eidolon** (in the form of a howling, ghostly abishai) to rise from the fiery pool. The eidolon enters the **sacred statue** of Tiamat, which animates to attack all non-devils in the temple. See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more information on the eidolon and the sacred statue.

If the sacred statue is destroyed, the fire in the brass pool goes out and the room's protective aura is



dispelled. This causes the pixelating curse to reshape the temple in 1 hour.

**A Refreshing Dip.** While it burns, the fiery pool of oil radiates transmutation magic and evil, but it channels the same power that prevents the pixelating curse from transforming the temple. The abishai regularly bathe in the oil, which cures them of the pixelating curse if they contracted it elsewhere on the cube. Any creature can submerge itself in the burning oil, which drains 1 physical level and 1 mental level of the pixelating curse at the end of each of the creature's turns. The curse is removed when the creature reaches physical level 0. However, any non-abishai that enters the pool takes 14 (4d6) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

### AREA 6.39: BOTTOM OF THE RIFT

As the characters approach this room, they hear a scream that gets suddenly louder, then ends in a bone-crushing thump. If they wait in the hall, the pattern of sound repeats every six seconds. See area 6.14 for more information.

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** Some massive force has torn open the roof of this chamber, revealing huge pixelated steel girders and pipes, and creating a great hole that opens up to darkness overhead. In the center of this area, below the hole, a pile of unpixelated bodies rises twenty feet high.

**Unpixelated.** The shattered girders and pipes reveal the deadly sharpness of their edges.

**Death From Above.** Adults of every race and gender are represented among the dead. Most are human, but gnomes, dwarves, and other creatures can also be seen. All are naked, and appear to have died from the fall. Every six seconds, a screaming humanoid falls from the darkness and smashes into the top of the pile of bodies, where it dies of massive trauma. Characters who attempt to climb to the top of the pile are at risk of being struck by a falling body, and must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw each round or take 17 (5d6) bludgeoning damage.

Bodies that fall here become infected by the pixelating curse, and characters who inspect the pile see that the bodies at the bottom (those that have been here the longest) are beginning to turn cubic. However, the bodies are regularly cleaned up by the hellfire engine that patrols this area (see area 6.41). If the hellfire engine is destroyed, the bodies rapidly begin to pile up, pixelate, and spread out at a rate of six hundred bodies per hour. Within four hours, this area becomes impassable. Over a longer period, the entire lower level—and eventually the entire cube—will be filled.

**Interrupted Fall.** The characters might attempt to rescue one or more of the falling individuals, using spells such as *feather fall* or *telekinesis*. If they are successful, see area 6.14 for more information.

### AREA 6.40: WIRING SHAFTS

Much smaller than normal corridors, these narrow spaces are filled with wires and pipes that occasionally emit heat and steam. A Small creature can squeeze into a wiring shaft with a successful DC 20 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, which must be made at each new area or junction. With a failed check, the character can peek into the area beyond but not enter it.

These access spaces for the cube's machinery were once used by duergar and gnome technicians. A creative character might attempt to damage the cube by unleashing powerful spells or attacks here. Anything less than a 9th-level spell is unlikely to seriously harm the cube, but might cause a distraction that the pixelated guards will investigate.

### AREA 6.41: PUMP ROOM

Pixelated or unpixelated, the appearance of this room is much the same: a great factory-like space filled with pumps, valves, and pipes. Most of the pipes lead into area 6.47, where they force water and debris into the exhaust shaft to be expelled.

**Cleaning Crew.** This room is dominated by a massive, boxy metal device with terrifying bestial mouths carved into it—a pixelated **hellfire engine**<sup>M</sup> modified by Avnas for cleaning duty. This gigantic construct regularly clears out the lower levels, rolling down the





main corridor to suck up bodies, debris, and small amounts of Styx water before returning here to shoot them through pipes into area 6.47. It has the statistics of a hellfire engine (including all of its attacks) with the following changes:

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures. Being unintelligent, it can communicate only emotions and vague feelings.
- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

The hellfire engine recognizes devils and servants of the skull lord, and attacks all other creatures on sight. Because of its size, the hellfire engine cannot leave the wide main corridor that runs around the lower level. However, it can attack creatures in nearby areas using its ranged weapons, liquefying foes with its Bonemelt Sprayer and sucking up any remains that flow into the main hall. If the construct sees an enemy go into a room it can't reach, it waits for them to come out as long as it can see them. If a creature goes out of its range and out of vision, the hellfire engine waits for 10 minutes, then goes back to its rounds.

#### AREA 6.42: DEATH TRAP

This area is an empty guardroom, similar to area 6.8 and the area 6.33 rooms on this level. It has an interior door leading to area 5.1, and a faint mosaic stain of small pink, white, and red cubes the spread across the walls and floor. The stain appears to have been scrubbed or wiped away in the center of the room, but nonetheless marks a distinct path between area 5.1 and area 6.43. A smell of rotten meat can also be sensed in the direction of area 6.43.

Creatures that slip and fall as a result of the gravity switch in area 5.2 drop nearly 600 feet and land here, taking 20d6 bludgeoning damage. The pixelated adult oblex of area 5.1 spends some of its time here eating fallen bodies, but the hellfire engine (area 6.41) cleans up most of the mess. With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check, a character confirms that the trail has been left by a slimy creature moving back and forth through this area.

#### AREA 6.43: TORTURE CHAMBER/OBLEX ROOM

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** Strange objects made of thick gray, black, and brown blocks fill this room. Some resemble tables, but their surfaces are irregular. Others look like upright cases or trunks big enough to walk into, while still others resemble siege equipment or oversized birdcages. Strange square mosaics mark the walls, and the floor is covered with irregular encrustations of black cubes, like a crystalline growth marked by occasional dark-green stains.

**Unpixelated.** The unknown objects within the room are all torture equipment—cruel devices beyond mortal imagination. The markings on the walls are symbols of Loviatar, goddess of pain.

The dark encrustation is a squishy slime excreted by the oblex spawn that feed in this area. Indigestible fragments are scattered within it, including bits of armor and chunks of yellow bone. The darker masses among the slime are eight pixelated **oblex spawn**<sup>M</sup>, which wait for prey to enter the room before swarming from all directions.

If injured, the **adult oblex**<sup>M</sup> at area 5.1 retreats to this room, where its spawn reinforce it.

#### AREA 6.44: TEMPLE OF LOVIATAR

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** The floor of this high-ceilinged chamber is lined with rows of what appear to be flat, square scales of glittering glass. At one end of the chamber stands a blocky pedestal, from which a black and white pixelated humanoid statue has fallen. Several faceless, blocky bodies lie on the floor, and the stench of rot hangs in the air.

**Unpixelated.** The statue depicts a woman with a beautiful and cruel face holding a whip—Loviatar, goddess of pain and consort of Bane. The scales on the floor are trenches filled with broken glass, which is deadly sharp and merely appears flat due to the pixelating curse. A creature that steps on the broken glass in bare feet or soft shoes takes 2 (1d4) piercing damage per 5 feet traveled.

The temple has been desecrated by the worshipers of the Archquadrone. The bodies of Loviatar's priests lie on the floor. All carry whips, daggers, and holy symbols, but nothing of value.

#### AREA 6.45: BERBALANG'S ROOM

This area is identical to the priests' barracks at area 6.37, except that one room here is used as a lair by Bunch, the skull lord's **berbalang**<sup>M</sup> ally. If the characters have not already met and destroyed Bunch, the berbalang is here counting its bones.

The berbalang's lair is filled with pixelated yellowish-gray skulls and bones to a depth of 4 feet, with duergar, gnome, and human remains the most common. Bunch obsessively sorts through its collection for hours on end, using *speak with dead* to mine the memories the skulls contain, then scribing those tales on the other bones. Bunch is protective of these treasures, and the berbalang runs to alert the skull lord if the characters mess with its collection.

Any character who searches the bones and succeeds on a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check finds a *ring of free action* within the pile.

#### AREA 6.46: TEMPLE OF LADUGUER

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

**Pixelated.** This wide chamber features a ceiling that is lower than the corridor outside. The floor is covered with rows of trenches, which surround a central heap of gray and black metallic cubes. Here and there, the trenches are darkly stained, and all around the room lie short, blocky figures from which the stench of rot rises.

**Unpixelated.** Duergar dead are scattered throughout what was once a temple to the duergar deity Laduguer,



Master of Crafts. The central heap is Laduguer's iron idol, which has been completely smashed. Only a close inspection identifies a few limbs and the crushed remains of the statue's beard.

#### AREA 6.47: EXHAUST SHAFT

This roughly pixelated circular shaft rises nearly 200 feet from the oily pool at area 1.1 to the Heart Engine at area 6.28 far above. The temperature is warm here, and gets hotter as the shaft rises toward area 6.28. The shaft is dimly lit by red lights seen high above.

Characters who enter the cube from area 1.1 can climb or fly to the Heart Engine (although thick pipes block the engine from view until they reach it). The walls are slick with warm slime pouring down from a multitude of exhaust pipes and grates, making climbing difficult, but the cubic surfaces of the pixelated walls counteract this somewhat.

**Going Up.** Climbing the 300 feet between this area and area 6.28 requires six successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) checks. On a failed check, a creature falls and takes damage as normal.

A character who enters the bottom of the shaft and succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notices a number of dry pipes that are just barely large enough for a Small creature to crawl into. With a successful DC 20 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, a Small character can enter the wiring shafts (area 6.40).

The exhaust shaft periodically rumbles as black cubical slime and pixelated bodies pour out of its side pipes, then explode out through the pool at area 1.1 in a geyser of pressure and heat. If any character rolls a 1 on the Strength check to climb, the exhaust shaft begins to rumble and shake as the pressure builds. Two rounds later, the pressure wave hits, dealing 21 (6d6) fire damage and 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage to every creature in the shaft or in area 6.47. Each of those creatures must then succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be flung out of the shaft onto face 1.

The proximity to the Heart Engine makes the pixelating curse stronger within the shaft than outside it. While in the shaft, creatures must make all checks and saving throws related to the curse every 10 minutes, rather than at the end of each short rest. A creature that reaches physical level 2 while climbing the shaft has disadvantage on Strength checks as a result of the sudden transformation of its hands into rough, cubical mittens.

### ENDING THE ADVENTURE

Depending on their interactions with Vargo and their ultimate choice about what to do about the threat represented by Cube 1717, the characters might bring the adventure to a number of different conclusions.

#### VARGO AWAKENS THE CUBE

If Vargo manages to attune to all six parts of the Six-Face Throne, the skull lord reveals its new goal: the conquest of the Sword Coast. The cube is flown to the nearest city, where Vargo demands that the inhabitants surrender to its will—then blasts them with the cube cannon until they submit.

Any injured survivors of the cube cannon quickly pixelate, becoming additional soldiers under Vargo's control. Gradually, the skull lord's pixelated army grows, and the very landscape of the realm is transformed. Some lands resist Vargo, while others send offerings of gold, jewels, and magic items to be spared from the skull lord's destructive wrath and the pixel plague. The Sword Coast descends into darkness and terror.

#### PIXELS TRIUMPHANT


If Vargo is killed but another pixelated creature (including Sladek) remains alive and attuned to the Six-Face Throne, all the pixelated creatures of the cube telepathically confer among themselves. In truth, they never fully trusted Vargo because of the skull lord's unpixelated state. So with that undead master gone, its former followers can carry out their own plan: peacefully turning the entire world into pixels and spreading the glorious gift of the Archquadrone.

All pixelated creatures on the cube immediately converge on the Six-Face Throne, ready to attune to it or die trying. If enough of them are successful, the cube awakens and they send it flying away from the Styx sea. The cube lands in different spots on Faerûn, dropping off small groups of pixelated creatures to infect the land, the local vegetation, and all nearby creatures.

#### DESTRUCTION OF THE HEART ENGINE

The only way to truly stop the pixelating curse is to destroy the Heart Engine. When the Heart Engine reaches 0 hit points (or if it is completely immersed in the Styx sea), it explodes. A wave of energy sweeps out from it, unpixelating everything in and on the cube. Any surviving pixelated creatures come back to their senses.

With the Heart Engine gone, the Six-Face Throne stops functioning as well. The entire interior of the cube goes dark as its power fails and it sinks into the depths of the sea, never to rise again. If the characters are in the cube when this happens, you can decide how fast the cube sinks—and how perilous a time they have getting out before it's completely submerged and flooded.

After the characters return to port, word of their exploits will quickly spread, and the dark tale will be told of what the pixelating curse might have done had it been allowed to run unchecked. If the adventurers don't already have a reputation as legendary heroes, they soon will, as all the folk of the Sword Coast learn of how the characters saved the world from a terrible fate. 

**Design and Cartography:** Jason Bradley Thompson  
**Editing, Development, and Layout for *Dragon+*:**  
Scott Fitzgerald Gray

A full-size map of Face 6 is [available for download](#).



## APPENDIX: NEW MAGIC ITEMS

The following new magic items appear in this adventure.

### AMULET OF THE STYX

*Wondrous item, rare*

This amulet of smoked glass on a platinum chain contains a small amount of Styx water, making it resemble a round black gem unless closely inspected. While wearing the amulet, you are immune to the pixelating curse.

In addition, when you sleep or trance, you dream the lost memories of a random creature that has died, giving you some of that creature's skills and insights. At the end of a long rest taken while you wear the *amulet of the Styx*, you gain proficiency in one skill or with one tool of your choice. You cannot already have proficiency with the skill or tool kit. You lose this temporary proficiency at the end of your next long rest.

### BOOK OF PATTERNS

*Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)*

This ancient book appears to be a fine spellbook bound in the skin of some extradimensional creature. But the book contains no text, instead being filled with strange patterns. Some are curves; some are cubes; others are spiraling designs, or stars, or leaves and plant life; or patterns like hair and veins and flesh. Many of the patterns contain optical illusions, and seem to move disturbingly when seen from the corner of a viewer's eye.

A creature that merely looks at this book for the first time must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by the book. While charmed in this way, the creature is incapacitated and has a speed of 0. Unless it takes damage or is shaken out of its torpor by another creature as an action, the charmed creature remains staring at the book indefinitely, suffering one level of exhaustion every 4 hours until dead. A creature that succeeds on the save or has the charm broken can read the book safely.

Studying the book requires 48 hours of effort over a period of 7 or fewer days. At the end of this study, you must make a DC 17 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, you gain a form of indefinite madness (see chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) but can attempt to study the book again. With a successful save, you gain the ability to use charges from the book to cast spells as long as the book is in your possession.

The book has 8 charges. As an action, you can expend 1 or more charges to cast one of the following spells from it (save DC 17): *creation* (5 charges), *hypnotic pattern* (3 charges), *illusory script* (1 charge), *phantasmal force* (2 charges), or *phantasmal killer* (4 charges). The book regains 1d4 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn.

As long as you possess the book, your sleep is filled with dreams of its strange patterns. This might grant

you knowledge of unique rituals or magical effects, as determined by the DM.

### CENSER OF BLOOD

*Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)*

This brass incense burner hangs on a brass chain, and is covered with fiendish symbols and the names of ancient vampires. While the censer is on your person, you have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track by scent and Wisdom (Perception) checks to detect smells. In addition, you are aware of the exact location of any creature within 60 feet of you that is below its hit point maximum.

As an action, you can spill one drop or more of your own blood into the censer, causing it to steam. You suffer one level of exhaustion, and the censer issues forth 1d6 vampiric mists that appear within 10 feet of you. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for information on the vampiric mist.) You can repeat this process to create multiple mists, taking yourself to a maximum of five levels of exhaustion. The vampiric mists don't appear if you are in sunlight.

The summoned vampiric mists understand your language and obey your spoken commands. If you issue no commands, they attack all nearby humanoids except yourself, only sparing those that you specifically command them to.

You reduce levels of exhaustion imposed by the *censer of blood* in the normal fashion. Each mist lasts until it is destroyed, until you die, or until you dismiss it as a bonus action.

### HANDKERCHIEF OF DARKNESS

*Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)*

This black velvet handkerchief is inscribed with a repeating pattern of closed eyes. The handkerchief normally appears to be the size of a napkin, but it can be unfolded to the size of a tablecloth.

When the handkerchief is folded to the size of a napkin, you can drop or throw it as an action, creating an area of magical darkness around the handkerchief identical to that created by a *darkness* spell. The darkness endures until the handkerchief is picked up by a creature.

When the handkerchief is unfolded to the size of a tablecloth, you can throw it as an action to have it magically fly high in the air. The handkerchief hovers 50 feet above you and a shadowy fog billows out of it, filling a cylinder 100 feet high and 1,000 feet across, with the handkerchief at its center. The area of the fog is lightly obscured, and creatures that suffer negative effects while in sunlight ignore those effects while within the fog. The fog lasts until the handkerchief is picked up by a creature (typically one that can fly).

### MERRENOLOTH'S OAR

*Weapon, very rare (requires attunement)*

Made of special wood that grows only in the Lower Planes, this long oar is carved with ancient symbols of death from countless cultures.

While you hold the oar, you have advantage on Dexterity checks to maintain your balance while on



a watercraft. In addition, as a bonus action while you hold the oar, you can learn the depth of any water or liquid within sight, and the distance and direction to the closest land while you are on open water.

The *merrenoloth's oar* can be used as a weapon. It is treated as a *+1 lance* when so wielded, and it can be used one-handed while you are on board any watercraft.

### PIXEL GLASSES

*Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)*

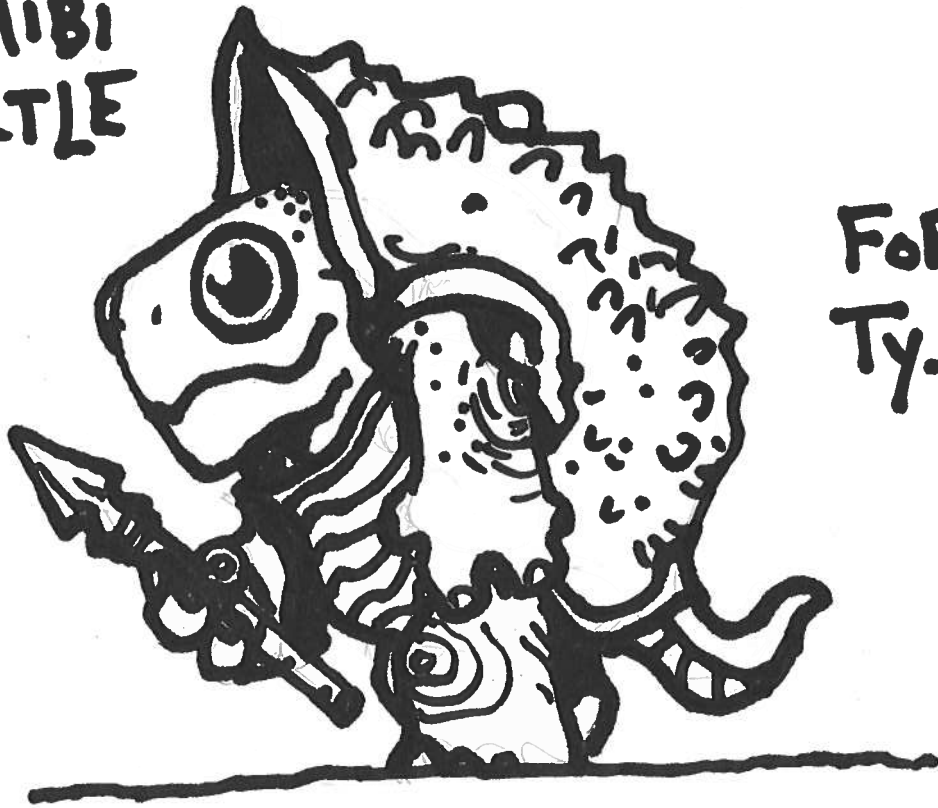
These unique magic items were created by the derro architect Avnas for use aboard the pixelated Cube 1717. However, their potential benefit to the characters is balanced by a dangerous curse.

The square lenses of the *pixel glasses* are cut of thick, dark glass. While wearing the glasses, you see pixelated objects and creatures as if they were normal, the same way that pixelated creatures do. However, normal creatures and objects look hideously distorted.

**Curse.** These glasses are cursed, and becoming attuned to them extends the curse to you. While you wear them, you have disadvantage on all saving throws to resist the pixelating curse. If you become cursed while wearing the glasses, the physical symptoms spread from the inside out, though your eyes transform immediately into solid cubes. Creatures at mental level 3 of the curse attempt to hide this from other creatures as long as possible.



CHIBI  
TURTLE



FOR  
TYLOR!

RW





CHIBI  
GIF



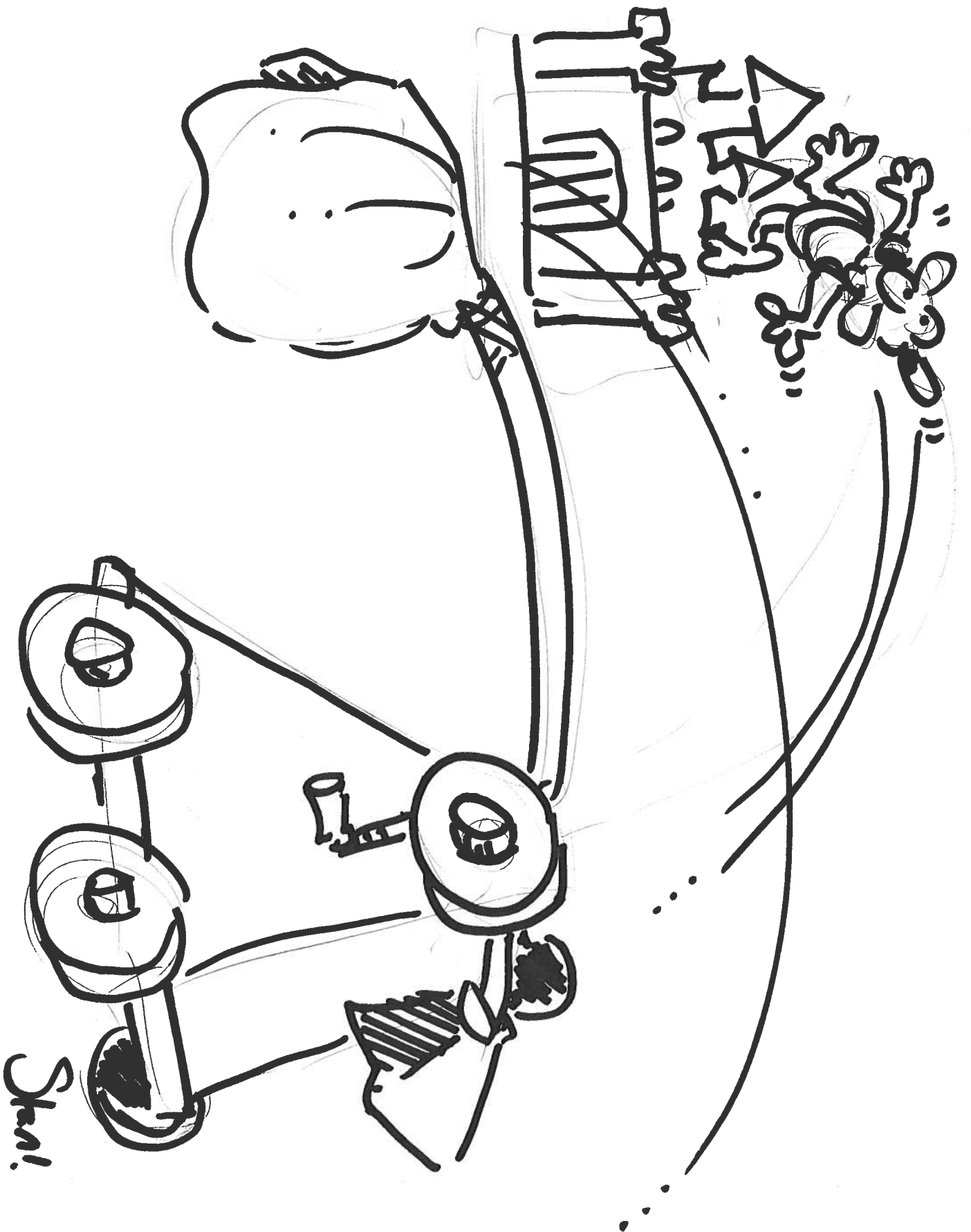
Stan!

CHAAAAARGE!

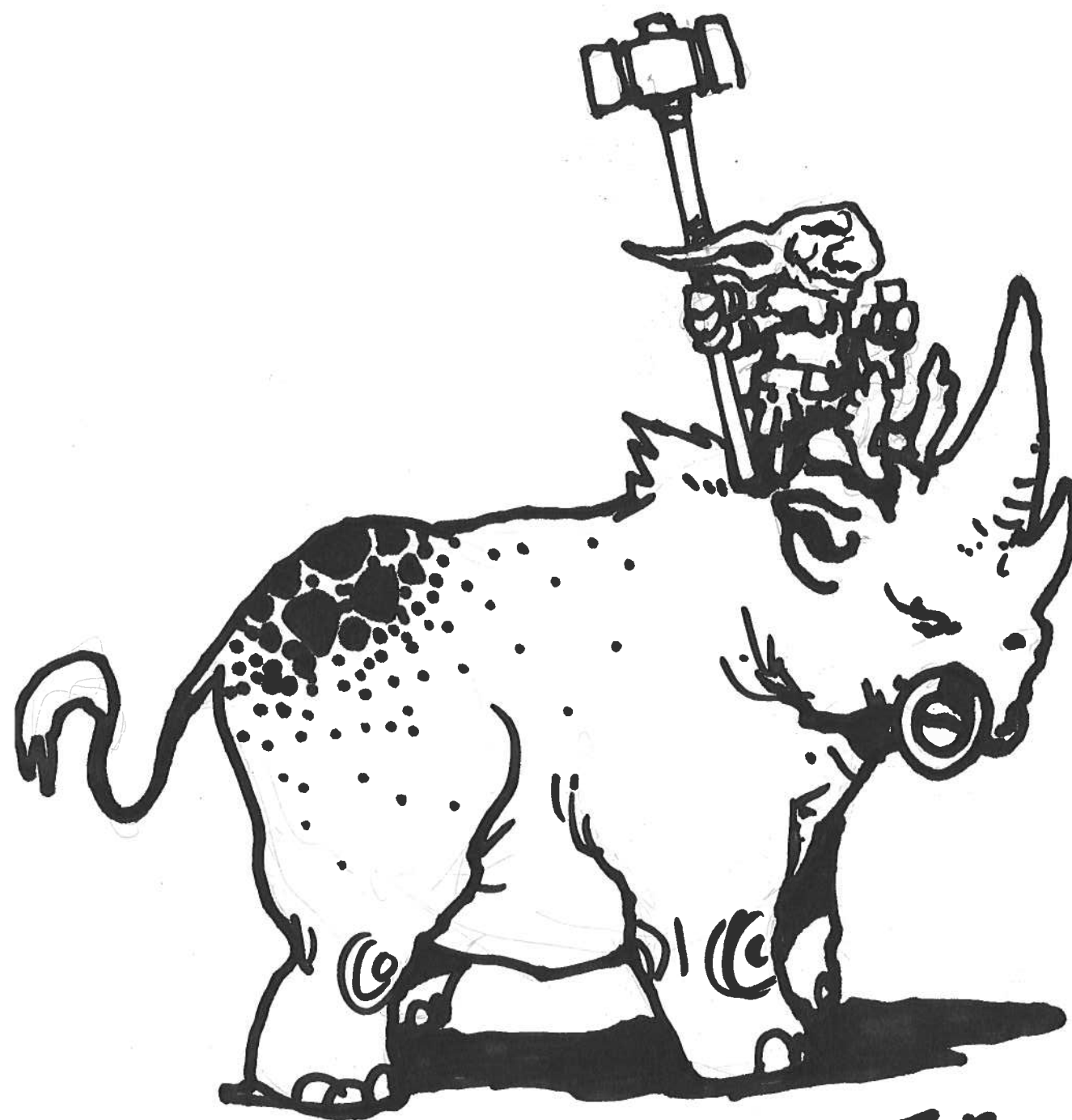
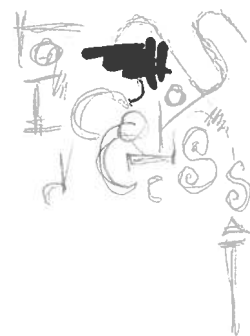


Spa!  
BATTERN' DWARF





East



RW

For  
BART





ANTEATER  
WIZARD







BY THE POWER  
OF PLATYPLOK  
THE SUN GOD...!





PEJHAM!



RW



NIER 018





# Unearthed Arcana: Races of Eberron

Races from the world of Eberron return to Unearthed Arcana this issue!



## Playtest Material

The material here is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your campaign but not refined by final game development and editing. They aren't officially part of the game and aren't permitted in D&D Adventurers League events.

If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.

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**W**ell, the news is finally out. We're adding two new worlds to the lineup of settings supported with products in fifth edition *D&D*. Keith Baker has taken his creation, the world of Eberron, and



unleashed it upon the DMs Guild. Ravnica has also opened its gates to D&D players in our first published crossover with *Magic: the Gathering*. I want to take a few moments to talk about what this means for D&D and its many, beloved worlds.

Keith has been in touch with us about Eberron for several years. Last summer, he worked with Jeremy Crawford and achieved a significant step forward in his vision for Eberron in fifth edition D&D. What does that mean for you?

To start with, the *Wayfarer's Guide to Eberron* is Keith's baby. We supplied him with some development funds to kick off his work, but otherwise gave him free rein to determine how he wanted to present the world. We agreed on the starting point—the key narrative device he created with Jeremy to solidify Eberron's place in the cosmos—but otherwise he was free to present Eberron as he envisioned it.

The *Wayfarer's Guide to Eberron* is a fusion of new mechanics and a guide to the world of Eberron. The major mechanical elements for the world will be featured in Unearthed Arcana, including races such as the shifter, warforged, and kalashtar, alongside the artificer character class. The races of Eberron are available now, and the artificer will follow in August. We will continue to keep the mechanical playtests available in Unearthed Arcana to ensure that as many players and DMs can take part as possible.

Publishing the *Wayfarer's Guide to Eberron* on the DMs Guild does two great things for us. First, it means that any Eberron fan can dive in and share their creations with other players and DMs. It also means that Keith can publish new products which match his interests at his own pace. The setting is truly in his hands. Best of all, we're adding Eberron to the Adventurers League to make it even easier for Eberron DMs and players to meet up and carry their characters from game to game.

We're interested in seeing reactions to this approach. We took this path because it allowed us to deliver an updated setting on a much tighter schedule than normal and that rewards the setting's most dedicated players and DMs. It's exciting to think about the other settings that can follow this path, but we want to take our time and make sure we get things right.

In terms of adding an Eberron product to our print schedule, we want to see how gamers react to Keith's work. This approach gives Keith a chance to tinker with the setting, test some new approaches, and build a network of players and DMs. With so many new players coming to D&D, we want to show a new generation of gamers the excitement of settings like Eberron before we add a product to schedule. The playtest of fifth edition *D&D* brought together a community that propelled us to our current success. We want to tap into the same dynamic for our settings.

Ravnica represents a different path for a setting. The Plane Shift articles generated a lot of interest, and gamers have been asking about an RPG using *Magic's* many fantastic planes since D&D joined the Wizards fold. Adding it to our schedule was an easy decision.

Ravnica's path to publication followed our traditional model. The new subclasses appeared in Unearthed Arcana earlier this year, and we've worked with the talented writers on the *Magic: The Gathering* team to bring that plane to life. In the future, you can expect similar crossovers with other games to work the same way. You can also expect settings that we feel are foundational parts of the multiverse, especially those that serve as a crossroads between worlds, to follow the same route.

At the end of the day, we hope this approach broadens the horizons of your D&D gaming, both at the table when you play and away from it when you plot and plan your characters and adventures. We're excited for this new direction and look forward to bringing even more worlds to you in the future.

***Mike Mearls***

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## Races of Eberron

The following document presents versions of several races from the D&D world of Eberron: changelings, kalashtar, shifters, and warforged. For more information about that world, see the *Wayfarer's Guide to Eberron*, available on the Dungeon Masters Guild.

[Download the PDF](#)



Later this month, a survey on these options will appear on the D&D website. Please try them out and let us know what you think.

To see the full treasure trove of Unearthed Arcana articles, covering new classes and feats, conversions of rules from previous editions, and much more, [visit the archive here](#).

Have a request for Unearthed Arcana? Follow [@mikemearls](#) on [Twitter](#) and let him know.

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# UNEARTHED ARCANA

## Races of Eberron

This document presents versions of several races from the D&D world of Eberron: changelings, kalashtar, shifters, and warforged. For more information about that world, see *Wayfinder's Guide to Eberron*, available on the Dungeon Masters Guild ([dmsguild.com](http://dmsguild.com)).

### This Is Playtest Content

The material here is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your campaign but not refined by final game design and editing. They aren't officially part of the game and aren't permitted in D&D Adventurers League events.

If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.

## Changelings

*Long ago there was a woman named Jes, and she had one hundred children. Her rivals conspired against her and swore to kill her children. Jes begged the Sovereigns for help, but their only answer was the wind and rain. In the depths of her despair, a lonely traveler took her hand. "I will protect your children if they follow my path. Let them wander the world. They may be shunned and feared, but they will never be destroyed." Jes agreed, and the traveler gave her his cloak. When she draped it over her children their old faces melted away, and they could be whoever they wanted to be. And so it remains. Though the Children are shunned by all, the gift of the Traveler protects them still.*

— Chance, changeling priest

A changeling can shift its face and form with a thought. Many changelings use this gift as a form of artistic and emotional expression, but it is an invaluable tool for grifters, spies, and others who wish to deceive. This leads many people to treat known changelings with fear and suspicion.

## Hidden People

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Changelings are spread across Khorvaire. Wherever humans can be found, there are changelings; the question is whether their presence is known.

Changelings are born to one of three paths. A few are born and raised in stable communities, where changelings are true to their nature and deal openly with the people around them. Some are orphans, raised by other races, who find their way in the world without ever knowing another like themselves. Still others are part of the nomadic changeling clans spread across the Five Nations who keep their true nature hidden from the single-skins. Some of these clans maintain safe havens in major cities and communities, but most prefer to wander, following the unpredictable path of the Traveler.

In creating a changeling adventurer, consider the character's relationships with the people around them. Does the character conceal their true changeling nature, or do they embrace it? Do they have connections to a changeling community or clan, or are they alone and in search of companions?

## Masks and Personas

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In their natural form, changelings are slender and pale with colorless eyes and silver-white hair. A changeling can alter its physical appearance with a thought. While this can be used to deceive others, it is a natural form of expression for the changeling. A changeling shifts shapes the way others might change clothes. A casual shape—one created on the spur of the moment, with no depth or history—is called a mask. A changeling mask can be used to express a mood or to serve a specific purpose and then never used again. However, many changelings develop identities that have more depth. They build an identity over time, crafting a persona, with history and beliefs. This focused identity helps a changeling pinpoint a particular



skill or emotion. A changeling adventurer might have personas for many situations, including negotiation, investigation, and combat. Personas can be shared by multiple changelings; there might be three healers in a community, but whoever is on duty will adopt the persona of Tek, the kindly old medic. Personas can even be passed down through a family, allowing a younger changeling to take advantage of contacts established by previous users of the persona.

## Changeling Names

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A changeling might use a different name for each mask and persona, adopting new names as easily as they develop new faces. The true name of a changeling tends to be monosyllabic; however, there are often accents to a changeling's name that are expressed through shapeshifting, something single-skins will likely miss. For instance, two changelings might have the name Jin, but one is Jin-with-vivid-blue-eyes and one is Jin-with-golden-cheeks.

Changelings have a fluid relationship with gender, seeing it as one characteristic to change among many others.

**Changeling Names:** Bin, Cas, Dox, Fie, Hars, Jin, Lam, Mas, Nix, Ot, Paik, Ruz, Sim, Toox, Vil, Yug

## Changeling Traits

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Your changeling character has the following traits.

**Ability Score Increase.** Your Charisma score increases by 2, and either your Dexterity or your Intelligence increases by 1 (your choice).

**Age.** Changelings mature slightly faster than humans but share a similar lifespan—typically a century or less. While a changeling can shapeshift to conceal their age, the effects of aging still catch up to them.

**Alignment.** Changelings hate to be bound in any way, and those who follow the path of the Traveler believe that chaos and change are important aspects of life. Most tend toward pragmatic neutrality as opposed to being concerned with lofty ideals. Few changelings embrace evil.

**Size.** In their natural forms, changelings average between 5 and 6 feet in height, with a slender build. Your size is Medium.

**Speed.** Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

**Change Appearance.** As an action, you can transform your appearance or revert to your natural form. You can't duplicate the appearance of a creature you've never seen, and you revert to your natural form if you die.

You decide what you look like, including your height, weight, facial features, the sound of your voice, coloration, hair length, sex, and any other distinguishing characteristics. You can make yourself appear as a member of another race, though none of your game statistics change. You also can't appear as a creature of a different size than you, and your basic shape stays the same; if you're bipedal, you can't use this trait to become quadrupedal, for instance. Your clothing and other equipment don't change in appearance, size, or shape to match your new form, requiring you to keep a few extra outfits on hand to make the most compelling disguise possible.

Even to the most astute observers, your ruse is usually indiscernible. If you rouse suspicion, or if a wary creature suspects something is amiss, you have advantage on any Charisma (Deception) check you make to avoid detection.

**Changeling Instincts.** You gain proficiency with two of the following skills of your choice: Deception, Insight, Intimidation, or Persuasion.

**Unsettling Visage.** When a creature you can see makes an attack roll against you, you can use your reaction to impose disadvantage on the roll. You must use this feature before knowing whether the attack hits or misses.

Using this trait reveals your shapeshifting nature to any creature within 30 feet that can see you. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

**Divergent Persona.** You gain proficiency with one tool of your choice. Define a persona associated with that proficiency: establish the name, race, gender, age, and other details. While you are in the form of this persona, the related proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make that uses that proficiency.

**Languages.** You can speak, read, and write Common and two other languages of your choice.

# Kalashtar

*I am kalashtar, born of two worlds. Over a thousand years ago, my ancestor bound her bloodline to the spirit Kashtai, and I am a child of that union. Kashtai moves within me. Her memories come to me in dreams, and at times her voice whispers in the silence of my mind. As long as at least one of my sisters is alive, Kashtai will survive—and as long as she lives, she will fight il-Lashtavar.*

—Lakashtai, servant of the light

The kalashtar are a compound race created from the union of humanity with renegade spirits from the plane of dreams—spirits called the quori. Kalashtar are often seen as wise, spiritual people with great compassion for others. But there is an unmistakable alien quality to the kalashtar, and they are haunted by the conflicts of their otherworldly spirits.

## Bound to Spirits

Every kalashtar has a connection to a spirit of light, shared by other members of their bloodline. Physically, kalashtar appear human, but the spiritual connection affects them in a variety of ways. Kalashtar have symmetrical, slightly angular features. Their movements and body language are different from those of humans; most beings find it graceful, but to some it feels unnerving. The eyes of a kalashtar often glow when it is focused on a task or feeling strong emotions.

The kalashtar can't directly communicate with their quori spirits. A kalashtar might experience the relationship as a sense of instinct and inspiration, drawing on the memories of the spirit when they dream. This connection grants the kalashtar minor psionic abilities, as well as protection from psychic attacks. All of these dream-spirits are virtuous, but some are warriors, while others are more contemplative or kind; a kalashtar player and DM can work together to determine the nature of the linked spirit. Typically, a kalashtar knows the name and nature of their spirit, but some—for instance, an orphan kalashtar raised among outsiders—might know nothing of their spirit or the source of their psychic gifts.

The bond to the spirit can cause some kalashtar to display unusual quirks of behavior. A kalashtar player can roll or select a trait from the following table.

### Kalashtar Quirks

d10	Quirk
1	You try to understand the motives and feelings of your enemies.
2	You prefer using telepathy over speaking aloud.
3	You feel a strong drive to protect the innocent.
4	You apply dream logic to mundane situations.
5	You discuss things out loud with your quori spirit.
6	You suppress your emotions and rely on logic.
7	You are strongly influenced by the emotions of those around you.
8	You prefer to find nonviolent solutions to problems whenever possible.
9	You are driven by a warrior spirit and will fight for any noble cause.
10	You are obsessed with Dreaming Dark conspiracies.

## Hunted by Nightmares

The virtuous spirits tied to the kalashtar fled from the dream realm of Dal Quor to escape the evil spirits that dominate the realm. The rebel quori believe that through meditation and devotion, they can eventually change the fundamental nature of Dal Quor, shifting the balance from darkness to light. Thus, most kalashtar communities focus on acts of devotion to the faith known as the Path of Light. But the dark powers of Dal Quor have their own plans on Eberron. Through the force known as the Dreaming Dark, these monsters are manipulating the people of Khorvaire and eliminating kalashtar whenever possible.

Many kalashtar defend themselves from the Dreaming Dark by living in close-knit communities, focusing on devotion to the Path of Light. But some among the kalashtar feel obliged to seek out the agents of the Dreaming Dark and oppose their plans, or simply to protect the innocent however they can. There are some kalashtar who have grown up isolated from their



kind, who know nothing about Dal Quor or the Dreaming Dark. Such orphans may use their abilities for personal gain or otherwise act against the virtuous instincts of their quori spirits; this can often cause internal conflicts and violent mood swings.

## Kalashtar Names

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A kalashtar name is formed by the blend of a personal prefix tied to the name of the quori spirit within the kalashtar. Each spirit has a gender identity, but this may or may not match the gender identity of the kalashtar host. Thus, a female kalashtar might have what others would consider a masculine name, because she's tied to a spirit with a masculine identity. Kalashtar orphans are unlikely to know the names of their spirits and instead take names from the cultures they're raised in.

**Male Quori Names:** Hareth, Khad, Kosh, Melk, Tash, Ulad, Vash

**Female Quori Names:** Ashana, Ashtai, Ishara, Nari, Tana, Tari, Vakri

**Kalashtar Names:** Coratash, Dalavash, Dolishara, Halakosh, Khoratari, Koratana, Lanhareth, Molavakri, Nevitash, Sorashana, Torashtai, Valakhad, Vishara

## Kalashtar Traits

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Your kalashtar character has the following traits.

**Ability Score Increase.** Your Wisdom and Charisma scores both increase by 1. In addition, one ability score of your choice increases by 1.

**Age.** Kalashtar develop physically at the same rate as humans do and have similar lifespans.

**Alignment.** The noble spirit tied to a kalashtar drives it toward lawful and good behavior. Most kalashtar combine self-discipline with compassion for all sentient beings, but some kalashtar resist the virtuous influence of their spirit.

**Size.** Kalashtar are similar in build to humans, though they are typically a few inches taller. Your size is Medium.

**Speed.** Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

**Dual Mind.** When you make a Wisdom saving throw, you can use your reaction to gain advantage on the roll. You can use this trait

immediately before or after you roll, but before any of the roll's effects occur.

**Mental Discipline.** You have resistance to psychic damage.

**Mind Link.** You can speak telepathically to any creature you can see within 60 feet of you. You don't need to share a language with the creature for it to understand your telepathic messages, but the creature must be able to understand at least one language or be telepathic itself.

As a bonus action when you're speaking telepathically to a creature, you can give that creature the ability to speak telepathically to you until the start of your next turn. To use this ability, the creature must be within 60 feet of you and able to see you.

**Psychic Glamour.** Choose one of the following skills: Insight, Intimidation, Performance, or Persuasion. You have advantage on all ability checks you make with that skill.

**Severed from Dreams.** Kalashtar sleep, but they don't connect to the plane of dreams as other creatures do. Instead, their minds draw from the memories of their otherworldly spirit while they sleep. As such, you are immune to spells and other magical effects that require you to dream, like the *dream* spell, but not to spells and effects that put you to sleep, like the *sleep* spell.

**Languages.** You can speak, read, and write Common, Quori, and one other language of your choice.

## Shifters

*Geth's ancient heritage rose up from deep within him, spreading out from the core of his being. Some shifters manifested terrible claws, massive fangs, astounding speed, or heightened senses. Geth's gift from his lycanthrope ancestors was sheer toughness. Strength seeped into his bones and flooded his flesh. His skin hardened, and his hair became coarse like an animal's tough hide. A sense of invincibility spread through him. For the moment, at least, he felt unstoppable!*

—Don Bassingthwaite, *The Binding Stone*

Shifters are sometimes called the weretouched, as many believe that they are the descendants of humans and lycanthropes. They are humanoids with a bestial aspect. While they can't fully

change shape, they can temporarily enhance their animalistic features—a state they call shifting. Whatever their origins, shifters have evolved into a unique race. A shifter walks on the knife's edge between the wilds and the world around them. Do they embrace their primal instincts or the path of civilization?

## The Beast Within

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Early in childhood, a shifter forms a bond with a beast within: a totemic force that shapes their body and mind. Some shifters believe that these spirits are independent entities, and they might speak of Bear or Wolf as ancestors or guides. Most just see the beast within as a formidable expression of their inner nature, something that emerges over time as the shifter's personality takes shape. The beast within is a pool of powerful instincts, and its influence is revealed by the shifter's personality: a feline shifter might be cool and distant, driven by predatory instincts, while a shifter with a lupine spirit is drawn to find and protect a pack. When a shifter fully embraces this beast within, they physically transform for a short time.

This beast within is reflected by the shifter's subrace. The following subraces are especially common:

**Beasthide** often signifies the bear or boar: stoic, stubborn and thick-skinned.

**Longtooth** shifters typically have lupine traits and are attracted to pack life.

**Swiftstride** shifters are often predatory and feline, but a swiftstride could also be a cunning rat who darts through the shadows.

**Wildhunt** shifters are born from any creature that tracks its prey.

While the beast within certainly has a physical impact on a shifter, it also has a spiritual and psychological effect. Two beasthide shifters share the same special ability, but if one has the aspect of the boar and the other is more like a bear, they'll be quite different in personality. With any shifter, identifying the beast within is a crucial part of understanding the character.

## Similar and Diverse

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Shifters are similar to humans in height and build but are more naturally lithe and flexible. Their facial features have a bestial cast, with large eyes, flat noses, and pointed ears; most shifters also have prominent canine teeth. They grow fur-like hair on nearly every part of their bodies.

The traits of the beast within affect a shifter's appearance as well. A swiftstride shifter might have catlike eyes and delicate build, while a beasthide shifter is likely a massive brute built like a bear. While a shifter's appearance might remind an onlooker of an animal, they remain clearly identifiable as shifters even when at their most feral.

## The Journey Yet to Come

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Shifters have a strong presence in the Eldeen Reaches, and they often live among humans and can be found in rural areas across Khorvaire. While they form powerful bonds with friends and kin, shifters place great value on self-reliance and freedom. It's a shifter proverb to "always be prepared for the journey yet to come," and most shifters strive to be ready for change or opportunity.

Shifters have a natural inclination toward classes with a primal connection. A shifter barbarian draws their rage from the beast within. A shifter ranger indulges their urge to wander and hunt. A shifter rogue harnesses their own predatory instincts. But shifters can pursue any path or faith.

## Shifter Names

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Shifters have no language of their own and often live in blended communities. As such, shifter names typically overlap with the names of other cultures in their region. Many shifters prefer to keep their personal names for their friends and use "wandering names" with strangers. These are usually tied to an obvious physical or personality trait.

**Shifter Names:** Badger, Bear, Cat, Fang, Grace, Grim, Moon, Rain, Red, Scar, Stripe, Swift, Whiskers, Wolf



## Shifter Traits

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Your shifter character has the following traits.

**Ability Score Increase.** Your Dexterity score increases by 1.

**Age.** Shifters are quick to mature both physically and emotionally, reaching young adulthood at age 10. They rarely live to be more than 70 years old.

**Alignment.** Shifters tend toward neutrality, being more focused on survival than concepts of good and evil. A love of personal freedom can drive shifters toward chaotic alignments.

**Size.** Shifters range from 5 to almost 7 feet tall, depending on their subrace. Your size is Medium.

**Speed.** Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

**Darkvision.** You have superior vision in dark and dim conditions. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

**Keen Senses.** You have proficiency with the Perception skill.

**Shifting.** As a bonus action, you can assume a more bestial appearance. This transformation lasts for 1 minute, until you die, or until you revert to your normal appearance as a bonus action. When you shift, you gain temporary hit points equal to your level + your Constitution modifier (minimum of 1 temporary hit point). You also gain additional benefits that depend on your shifter subrace, described below.

Once you shift, you can't do so again until you finish a short or long rest.

**Languages.** You can speak, read, and write Common.

**Subrace.** Choose one of the following subraces, representing the beast within: beasthide, longtooth, swiftstride, or wildhunt.

### Beasthide

Stoic and solid, a beasthide shifter draws strength and stamina from the beast within. Beasthide shifters are typically tied to the bear or the boar, but any creature known for its toughness could apply.

**Ability Score Increase.** Your Constitution score increases by 2.

**Tough.** You have proficiency with the Athletics skill.

**Shifting Feature.** Whenever you shift, you gain 1d6 additional temporary hit points, and while shifted, you have a +1 bonus to your AC.

### Longtooth

Longtooth shifters are fierce and aggressive, but they form deep bonds with their friends. Many longtooth shifters have canine traits that become more pronounced as they shift, but they might instead draw on tigers, hyenas, or other predators.

**Ability Score Increase.** Your Strength score increases by 2.

**Fierce.** You have proficiency with the Intimidation skill.

**Shifting Feature.** While shifted, you can use your elongated fangs to make an unarmed strike as a bonus action. If you hit with your fangs, you can deal piercing damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier, instead of the bludgeoning damage normal for an unarmed strike.

### Swiftstride

Swiftstride shifters are graceful and quick.

Typically feline in nature, swiftstride shifters are often aloof and difficult to pin down physically or socially.

**Ability Score Increase.** Your Dexterity and Charisma scores both increase by 1.

**Graceful.** You have proficiency with the Acrobatics skill.

**Swift Stride.** Your walking speed increases by 5 feet.

**Shifting Feature.** While shifted, your walking speed increases by 5 feet. Additionally, you can move up to 10 feet as a reaction when an enemy ends its turn within 5 feet of you. This movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.

### Wildhunt

Wildhunt shifters are sharp and insightful. Some are constantly alert, wary for possible threats. Others focus on their intuition, searching within. Wildhunt shifters are excellent hunters, and they also tend to become the spiritual leaders of shifter communities.

**Ability Score Increase.** Your Wisdom score increases by 2.

**Natural Tracker.** You have proficiency with the Survival skill.

**Mark the Scent.** As a bonus action, you can mark one creature you can see within 10 feet of you. Until the end of your next long rest, your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make to find the marked creature, and you always know the location of that creature if it is within 60 feet of you. You can't use this trait again until you finish a short or long rest.

**Shifting Feature.** While shifted, you have advantage on Wisdom checks.

## Warforged

*"Pierce was built by design, while you were built by accident," Lakashtai said. "The soul is what matters, not the shape of the vessel."*

*"What makes you think he has a soul?" Gerrion said.*

*"What makes you think you do?"*

—Keith Baker, *The Shattered Land*

The warforged were built to fight in the Last War. The first warforged were mindless automatons, but House Cannith devoted vast resources to improving these steel soldiers. An unexpected breakthrough produced fully sentient soldiers, blending organic and inorganic materials. Warforged may be made from wood and metal, but they can feel pain and emotion. Built as weapons, they must now find a purpose beyond the war. A warforged can be a steadfast ally, a cold-hearted killing machine, or a visionary in search of purpose and meaning.

## Living Steel and Stone

Warforged are formed from a blend of organic and inorganic materials. Root-like cords infused with alchemical fluids serve as their muscles, wrapped around a framework of steel, darkwood, or stone. Armored plates form a protective outer shell and reinforce joints. All warforged share a common facial design, with a hinged jaw and crystal eyes embedded beneath a reinforced brow ridge. A sigil is engraved into the center of the forehead; this is unique to each warforged. Beyond these common elements of warforged design, the precise materials and build of a warforged vary based on the purpose for which it was designed. A juggernaut warrior is a massive brute sheathed in heavy steel plates,

while a skirmisher can be crafted from wood and light mithral to grant it lithe and elegant movement.

While they are formed from stone and steel, warforged are humanoids. Resting, healing magic, and the Medicine skill all provide the same benefits to warforged that they do to other humanoids. A warforged can focus its mind on its body as it rests, adjusting its shape and form to assume one of a few defensive postures. A warforged who expects heavy combat might focus on durability, while during a time of peace they might be content to adopt a lighter, less aggressive form.

## Warforged Personality

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The warforged were built to serve and to fight. For most of their existence, warforged had a clearly defined function and were encouraged to focus purely on that role. The Treaty of Thronehold gave them freedom, but many warforged struggle both to find a place in the post-war world and to relate to the creatures that created them.

The typical warforged shows little emotion. Many warforged embrace a concrete purpose—protecting allies, completing a contract, or other pursuits—and devote themselves to this task as they once did to war. However, there are warforged who delight in exploring their feelings and their freedom. Most warforged have no interest in religion, but some embrace faith and mysticism, seeking higher purpose and deeper meaning.

The typical warforged has a muscular, sexless body shape. Some warforged ignore the concept of gender entirely, while others adopt a gender identity in emulation of the creatures around them.

## Quirks

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Whether due to some flaw in their creation or ignorance of how other creatures operate, warforged often acquire an odd personality trait or two. A warforged player can choose to roll or select a trait from the Warforged Quirks table.



## Warforged Quirks

d10	Quirk
1	You analyze (out loud) the potential threat posed by every creature you meet.
2	You don't understand emotions and often misread emotional cues.
3	You are fiercely protective of anyone you consider a friend.
4	You often say the things you are thinking aloud without realizing it.
5	You try to apply wartime tactics and discipline to every situation.
6	You don't know how to filter your feelings and are prone to dramatic emotional outbursts.
7	You don't understand clothing beyond its utility and assume that what a creature wears denotes its job and status.
8	You are obsessed with your appearance, and constantly polish and buff your armor.
9	You are deeply concerned with following proper procedures and protocols.
10	War is the only thing that makes sense to you, and you're always looking for a fight.

## Warforged Names

Warforged were assigned numerical designations for use in military service. Many of them adopted nicknames, often given to them by their comrades. As free individuals, some have chosen new names as a way to express their path in life. A few take on human names, often the name of a fallen friend or mentor.

**Warforged Names:** Anchor, Banner, Bastion, Blade, Blue, Bow, Church, Crunch, Crystal, Dagger, Dent, Five, Glaive, Hammer, Iron, Lucky, Mace, Pants, Pierce, Red, Rusty, Scout, Seven, Shield, Slash, Smith, Spike, Stone, Temple, Vault, Wall, Wood

## Warforged Traits

Your warforged character has the following traits.

**Ability Score Increase.** Your Constitution score increases by 1.

**Age.** A typical warforged is between two and thirty years old. The maximum lifespan of the warforged remains a mystery; so far, warforged have shown no signs of deterioration due to age.

**Alignment.** Most warforged take comfort in order and discipline, tending toward law and neutrality, but some have absorbed the morality—or lack thereof—of the beings they served with.

**Size.** Your size is Medium. Most warforged stand between 5 and 6½ feet tall. Build is affected by your subrace.

**Speed.** Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

**Warforged Resilience.** You were created to have remarkable fortitude, represented by the following benefits:

- You have advantage on saving throws against being poisoned, and you have resistance to poison damage.
- You are immune to disease.
- You don't need to eat, drink, or breathe.
- You don't need to sleep and don't suffer the effects of exhaustion due to lack of rest, and magic can't put you to sleep.

**Sentry's Rest.** When you take a long rest, you must spend at least six hours of it in an inactive, motionless state, rather than sleeping. In this state, you appear inert, but it doesn't render you unconscious, and you can see and hear as normal.

**Integrated Protection.** Your body has built-in protective layers, which determine your Armor Class. You gain no benefit from wearing armor, but if you are using a shield, you apply its bonus as normal.

You can alter your body to enter different defensive modes; each time you finish a long rest, choose one mode to adopt from the Integrated Protection table, provided you meet the mode's prerequisite.

### Integrated Protection

Mode	Prerequisite	Armor Class
Darkwood core (unarmored)	None	11 + your Dexterity modifier (add proficiency bonus if proficient with light armor)
Composite plating (armor)	Medium armor proficiency	13 + your Dexterity modifier (maximum of 2) + your proficiency bonus
Heavy plating (armor)	Heavy armor proficiency	16 + your proficiency bonus; disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks

**Languages.** You can speak, read, and write Common.

**Subrace.** As a warforged, your body was designed for a specific purpose. Choose one of these subraces: envoy, juggernaut, or skirmisher.

## Envoy

As an envoy, you were designed with a certain specialized function in mind. You might be an assassin, a healer, or an entertainer, to name a few possibilities. Envoys are the rarest of the warforged subraces, and yours could be a unique design.

**Ability Score Increase.** Two different ability scores of your choice each increase by 1.

**Specialized Design.** You gain one skill proficiency of your choice, one tool proficiency of your choice, and fluency in one language of your choice.

**Integrated Tool.** Choose one tool you're proficient with. This tool is integrated into your body, and you double your proficiency bonus for any ability checks you make with it. You must have your hands free to use this integrated tool.

## Envoys: Specialized Design

As the name implies, most warforged were built to fight in the Last War. The vast majority of warforged are juggernauts or skirmishers—soldiers and scouts who fought under the banner of one of the Five Nations. Warforged envoys, however, were designed to perform other functions. As an envoy, you have a skill, a tool proficiency, and a tool that's part of your body. When you make an envoy character, consider the following questions: What is your purpose? How does your skill and your tool reflect that purpose? What form does your integrated tool take? If you have embedded thieves' tools, for instance, are your fingers actually lockpicks, or can you produce keys from various parts of your body? The following characters are examples of warforged with integrated tools.

**Lute** is a bard with the entertainer background; his namesake instrument folds out of his left arm.

**Compass Rose** is a wizard with the outlander background. A keen explorer, she uses her built-in cartographer's tools to record the paths she travels.

**Masque** is an infiltrator. A rogue with the charlatan background and an integrated disguise kit, she was built to blend in and assassinate. Cannith built six warforged of her design, and Masque has vowed to hunt down and destroy the other five.

In developing your integrated tool, remember that you must have your hands free to use it. Masque, the infiltrator mentioned above, doesn't shapeshift like a changeling; she has to manually adjust her appearance.

## Juggernaut

You're an imposing war machine built for close combat and raw might. You tower over your comrades: juggernaut warforged stand between 6 and 7 feet in height and can weigh up to 450 pounds.

**Ability Score Increase.** Your Strength score increases by 2.

**Iron Fists.** When you hit with an unarmed strike, you can deal 1d4 + your Strength modifier bludgeoning damage, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike.

**Powerful Build.** You count as one size larger when determining your carrying capacity and the weight you can push, drag, or lift.

## Skirmisher

You were built to scout the edges of battle and outmaneuver your enemies. You are lean and designed for speed.

**Ability Score Increase.** Your Dexterity score increases by 2.

**Swift.** Your walking speed increases by 5 feet.

**Light Step.** When you are traveling alone for an extended period of time (one hour or more), you can move stealthily at a normal pace. (See chapter 8 of the *Player's Handbook* for information about travel pace.)



# Next Issue: Dragon+ 22

Join our stream of consciousness in the next exciting edition of *Dragon+*!



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If you loved our “In The Works” expose on page six then you need to check out Issue 22, where we really show off the goods. We’ll take our first deep dive into *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*, including a preview of what’s between its covers and some exclusive concept art.

On top of that we’ll be shifting planes and touching down in the world of Ravnica as Dungeons & Dragons mashes up with *Magic: The Gathering*. New sourcebook *The Guildmasters’ Guide to Ravnica* fully realizes that plane, the structure of its society and the region’s unusual spiritual qualities so that Dungeon Masters can bring it to life for their players.

Continuing the link-up between games, we’ll also discover how you can plunder your *Magic* card collection to use them as D&D items!

There’s all this, plus we explore the imposing *Dragon* archive looking for gems and serve up all our regulars like maps of the month, the best of the DMs Guild, a selection of video and audio highlights, and much more!

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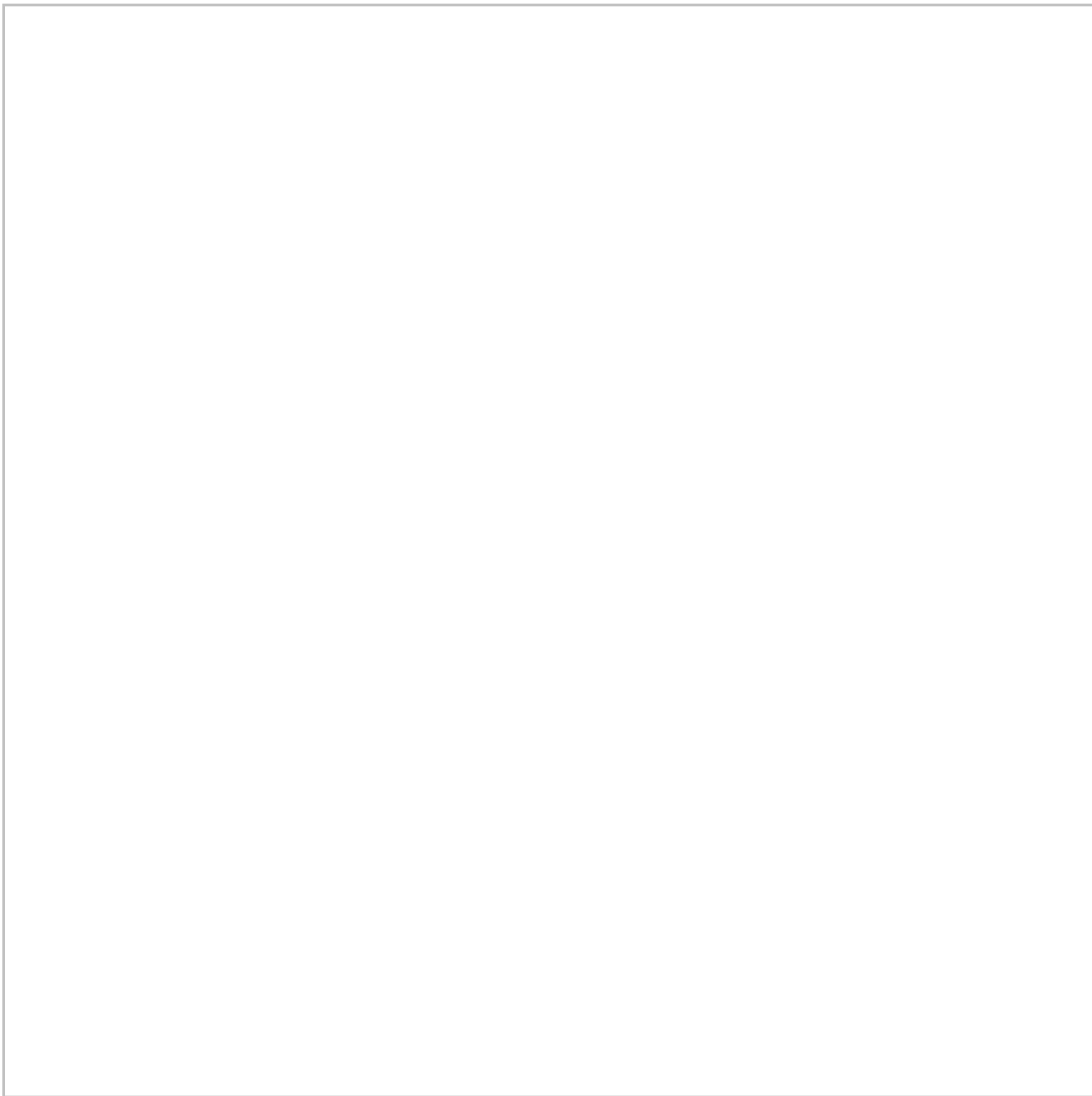
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